

JANUARY 17, 2005

IN THESE TIMES

THE STORY PROCTER & GAMBLE CENSORED

How mercury- tainted tuna damages fetal brains

By Sandra Steingraber



Contents

Volume 29 • Number 4

Ethnic Tensions Smolder in China

By Jehangir S. Pocha

- 14** China's one-track focus on its economy has led to massive social unrest.

Fish May Be Hazardous to Your Health By Sandra Steingraber

- 16** The story Procter & Gamble doesn't want you to read.

Talking to Strangers By Danielle Allen

- 18** Democracy dies when the minority can no longer trust the majority.

Maytag Moves to Mexico By David Moberg

- 22** The closing of Maytag's Illinois plant leaves manufacturing workers pondering an uncertain future.

- 11** **The Third Coast** By Salim Muwakkil
Gary Webb, word warrior.

- 12** **Viewpoint** By Jeff Epton
Organizing against the war is not enough.

- 13** **Viewpoint** By Hans Johnson
A test of values.

6 The Real Scandal By Frida Berrigan

The U.N.'s Oil-for-Food program was corrupt, but blaming only Kofi Annan ignores Washington's own complicity.

8 Lockout KO'd By David Bacon

Trans-state and trans-union solidarity helped San Francisco hotel workers win reinstatement.

8 Appall-O-Meter

By David Mulcahey

10 In Person By Aaron Sarver

Robert McChesney on the maturing media movement.



24 • Ratio Nation By Curtis White

BOOKS *Freethinkers* and *Against the Machine* take up an old debate.

26 • Appeal to Unreason By James Parker

MUSIC Heavy metal, Tom DeLay and the reptile brain.

27 • Israel's Ideologues By Neve Gordon

MEDIA The anti-McCarthy McCarthyites open an overseas branch.

32 • Radio Insurgente By Deepa Fernandes

Our radio is our weapon: Zapatistas give voice to the voiceless.

Cover by Seamus Holman

“All members of the R.C.P. who are in any way dubious, unreliable, or who have failed to prove their stability, should be removed from the Party, with the right of re-admission upon further verification and test.

—V.I. LENIN, 1921
“A CHECK-UP AND PURGE OF
THE R.C.P.(B.) MEMBERSHIP”



Editorial

Time for a Purge? By Joel Bleifuss

Debate is raging about the future direction of the Democratic Party. What is our message? What is our strategy? Who are our leaders?

If we are to win elections and govern, these important questions need to be resolved. But it is one thing to plot an electoral strategy, and another to understand and convey the realities of the world we live in. These are separate, if connected, tasks.

In the December 12 *New Republic*, Editor Peter Beinart made a splash when he wrote that Kerry's "fundamental problem was the party's liberal base." He went on to say:

The challenge for the Democrats today is ... to transform the party at its grassroots so that a different kind of presidential candidate can emerge. That means abandoning the unity-at-all costs ethos that governed American liberalism in 2004. And it requires a sustained battle to wrest the Democratic Party from the heirs of Henry ["soft" on communism] Wallace. In the party today, two such heirs loom largest: Michael Moore and MoveOn.

While Beinart's analysis is a touch farcical, he does delineate the central issue facing Democrats. Should the party follow the tried-and-failed path of the post-World War II crusade against communism and wage a global war against al Qaeda, or should it advocate for a more principled U.S. engagement with the world that addresses the root causes of

Islamic fundamentalism.

The first path is the one the United States currently blazes. Uncritical support for the right-wing Likud government's repression of Palestinians puts the United States, in the eyes of the world, on the side of the oppressor. The misguided war in Iraq, buttressed by official disinformation, foments Islamic extremism and expands the ranks of al Qaeda. At the same time, it gives the United States de facto control of one of the world's largest oil reserves.

Parallels between the war in Iraq and U.S. Cold War adventures abound. The 1953 overthrow of the democratically elected Mohammad Mossadegh in Iran secured U.S. and British oil interests, and laid the ground for the eventual rise of fundamentalist clerics. The 1954 CIA coup against Guatemala's democratically elected President Jacobo Arbenz protected the holdings of the United Fruit Company (now Chiquita). The Vietnam War disaster lasted as long as it did because the Johnson and Nixon administrations systematically lied to the American people and persecuted anti-war dissidents. In the name of anti-communism, covert U.S. military operations in Central America in the '80s attacked popular movements for the benefit of right-wing oligarchies, while at home military

psy-ops specialists launched a propaganda campaign to defend that covert war.

Soviet expansionism was a real threat in its time. And al Qaeda today presents "a clear and present danger." What is questionable—and worthy of debate—is how best to respond to such threats, and how to prevent them from being transformed into vehicles for the neoconservatives' global schemes.

At the same time, progressives should link the discussion of how to counter both imperial militarism and the corporate domination of the global economy via the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and ever-expanding trade agreements. Indeed, military empire and corporate power are bound together like feral Siamese twins.

The right has heralded Beinart's arguments. In a recent column George Will wrote:

But how do you begin reforming a base polluted by the Michael Moore-MoveOn.org faction? ... Beinart is bravely trying to do for liberalism what another magazine editor—the *National Review's* William Buckley—did for conservatism by excommunicating the Birchers from the conservative movement.

In essence, under the guise of being tough on terror, Beinart and Will are allies. The right would like nothing more than for "responsible" Democrats to purge Moore and MoveOn from its grassroots base. With that "faction" of the Democratic Party nullified, the United States' military and corporate empire can reign supreme. ■



The Best We Can Do?

Salim Muwakkil's Third Coast column, "A Unified Front" (December 13), reflects the desperation characterizing current black political thought.

He describes the radio discussion between Jesse Jackson and Louis Farrakhan as "wide-ranging, informative and even revealing to those with a particular interest in the trajectory of these two black leaders—*arguably America's top two*." [My italics] He concludes, "But they broke little programmatic ground, other than hinting they might take their duet on the road."

Did this radio appearance really "reflect a new level of concern for the well-being of the black community as American heads into a right-wing future?" If these two gentlemen are still considered the best that constitutes black leadership, Muwakkil has illuminated

the main problem afflicting black politics.

Since the death of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., black leadership has experienced a prolonged vacuum. Jackson and Farrakhan merely reflect attempts to fill that empty space. Jackson's two runs for president never led to a well-defined political perspective, reflected in the demise of the Rainbow Coalition. Farrakhan's brief forays from his political isolation are merely extensions of the Nation of Islam's program of separatism.

What characterizes both Jackson and Farrakhan is their extreme opportunism and self-promotion, which has also corrupted most of black politics. Today's black leadership is composed, unfortunately, of confused elected officials, rap stars, pampered athletes,

hip-hop clothing moguls and entertainment impresarios. We have confused celebrity status with leadership. One wonders what type of leadership this grouping would have provided in the rural areas of Mississippi or Alabama during the height of the civil rights movement.

I must also take issue with the statements that "Jackson, heir to the civil rights icon the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. ... With King, he helped lead the fight to integrate the recalcitrant South." These statements are a disservice to those who put much more time in the trenches with Reverend King. Jackson did not become a part of the national, southern-based civil rights movement until 1965. By 1965, one of the important civil rights acts had already been passed, and another passed later that year.

Former activists, still living, such as John Lewis, Andrew Young, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Joseph Lowery, James Orange, Cynthia Washington, Fred Shuttlesworth, Julian Bond, Bob Moses, Karen House, Norman Hill and many others, living and deceased, played far more significant and greater roles. Muwakkil should read the extensive history of this great experience much more carefully.

Jackson and Farrakhan met ... what next?

Robert H. Wright
Waterbury, Conn.

Look Before You Leap

Greg Palast writes that Ohio Secretary of State Ken Blackwell "knows that if [in-precinct electronic ballot counting devices] had been installed, almost all of the 93,000 spoiled votes, from overwhelmingly Democratic areas, would have closed the gap on Bush's lead of 136,000 votes" ("The Ballots at the Back of the Bus," December 13). The machines would have alerted each voter to the fact that they had an overvote or undervote, and, in Palast's belief, most voters would have promptly found and corrected a problem in the presidential race.

As much as I'd like to believe it myself, though this is the crux of Palast's argument, this is probably a false assumption and it grossly oversimplifies the problem. I wrote the first analysis of these systems after Chicago first installed them in 2000. I've also spent many hours observing the use of these machines in dozens of Chicago's poorest precincts, most recently in the primary and the November election.

Consider an instance in which the machine reports an undervote to the voter. Even in the low likelihood that the presidential race was the particular race that was not successfully punched, the voter will, in most cases, allow the ballot to be accepted as is rather than return to the booth to diagnose the problem or even to take a second look at the cryptic ballot.

In jurisdictions using these systems, judges are required to explain to the voter about the undervote or overvote situation and the voter's options. But this is a very difficult thing to do several hundred times a day, and furthermore many voters did not expect to have to think that hard. Therefore, neither judge nor

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voter is adequately invested in this step in most instances, and in poor precincts the motivation on both sides is unfortunately even lower than in middle-class precincts. This is an unexpected but very real manifestation of the so-called Digital Divide.

This means that only a small percentage of the 93,000 spoiled Ohio ballots are likely to exhibit a problem in the presidential race, assuming no actual foul play occurred.

The most probable hypothetical theory that could make Greg Palast's fear a reality would be to have someone enter hundreds or thousands of voting booths and deliberately sabotage the devices in such a way that at least the presidential race would not punch through. This would be a very difficult conspiracy to perpetrate. Personally, I'd rather sit at a desk and try to hack a Diebold server.

I strongly believe foul play may have occurred in Ohio and elsewhere, perhaps decisive foul play. I also am acutely aware of the mass disenfranchisement of underclass voters and recognize that this epidemic should have been cured long ago, and that provisional ballots probably created more problems than they solved. But we must look much more carefully and critically at the problem and not leap to conclusions, or else our credibility will suffer.

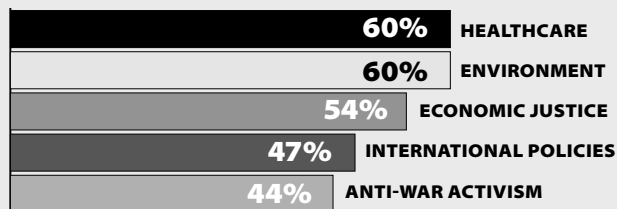
Peter Zelchenko
Chicago

Progressive Priorities Survey Results

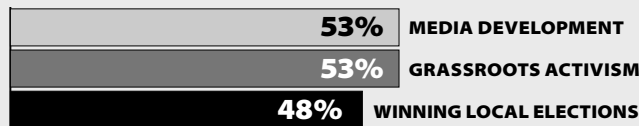
To counter the post-election implication that progressives have no "morals" or "values," *In These Times* conducted an informal survey of its online audience to determine how progressives define themselves and their principles.

Of the more than 450 people who responded to the survey, 75 percent agreed progressives should be concerned with "moral values." But the conservatives' narrowly defined frame for "moral values" seemed to be of minor importance.

What are the top five key issues for progressives in the next four years?



What three tactics should progressives focus on?



What values do progressives have in common?

"The economy is here for our benefit, not vice versa."
 "We are stewards of our planet, not stockholders."
 "Empathy: other people's suffering matters."
 "Injustice is repugnant."

How do you define your personal principles and values?

"My personal principles and values stem from a deep respect for individual rights and liberties balanced by an understanding that, in the interest in the well being of society, I must accept the limiting of certain of my freedoms."

Read more responses and start your own discussion about progressive values and priorities at www.inthesetimes.com.

IN THESE TIMES

"With liberty and justice for all..."

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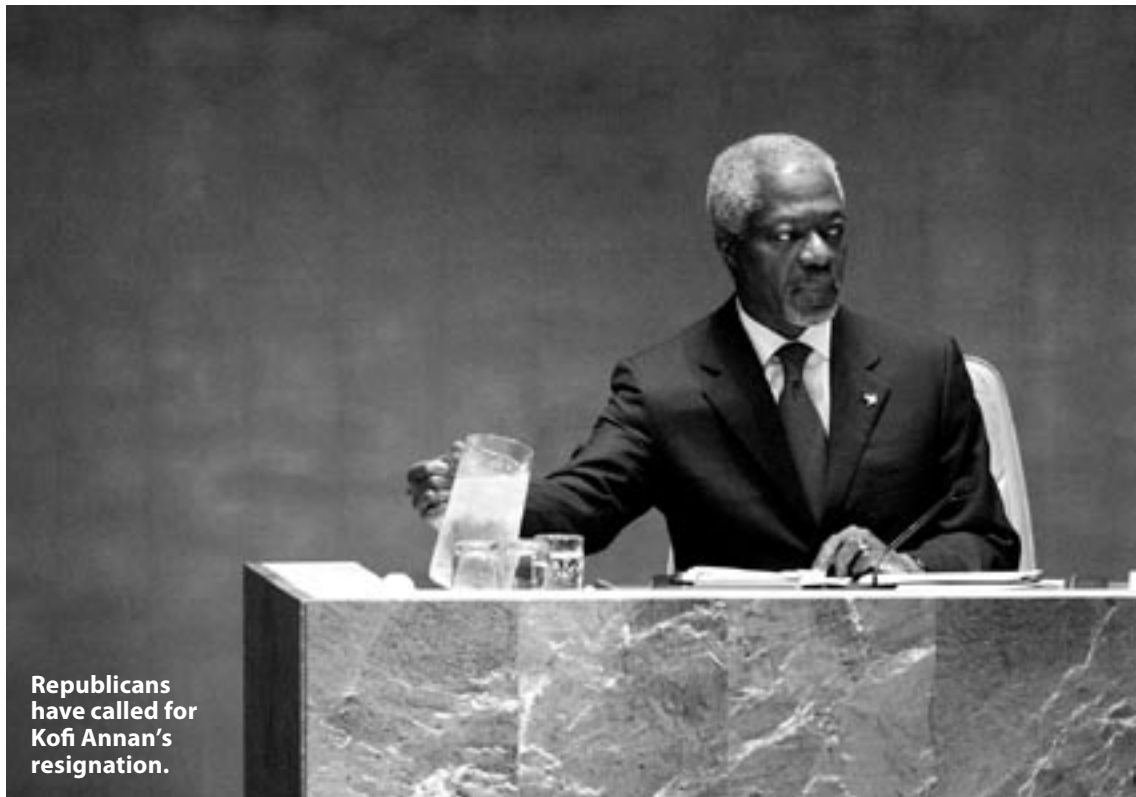
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Republicans have called for Kofi Annan's resignation.

SPENCER PLATT / GETTY

The Real Scandal

The Oil-for-Food program may have been corrupt, but more dangerous dealings have been ignored. By Frida Berrigan

WAS THE U.N.'S OIL-FOR-FOOD PROGRAM (OFF) rotten? It looks like it. The U.N. Security Council created the program in 1996 to mitigate the impact on the civilian population of the economic sanctions aimed at toppling Saddam Hussein. It allowed Hussein's government to use the revenue from oil sales to purchase food, medicine and other humanitarian commodities.

The program is over and the sanctions have been lifted, but a number of recent reports have revealed that the program was used as a conduit by Saddam Hussein to generate illicit revenue to buy weapons.

In July, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) published a report asserting that Hussein had used the program and other illicit means to generate more than \$10 billion. Charles Duelfer, the CIA's Special advisor for strategy regarding Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction, agreed with the GAO's total figure, but estimated that just

16 percent, or about \$1.7 billion, was related to the OFF.

These revelations, along with a swirl of other allegations—including the purported involvement of Kojo Annan, the secretary-general's adult son, and assertions that the former head of the OFF, Benon Sevan, took bribes—have elicited a prompt response from U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan. The Secretariat asked Paul Volcker, the former U.S. Federal Reserve chairman, to head a probe into the OFF. Volcker will release a preliminary report in January, with final conclusions to be published by mid-2005.

Members of Congress have been quick to believe the worst of the allegations and demand the severest penalties. Sen. Norm Coleman (R-Minn.), chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, led the vitriolic charge against the United Nations in a December 1 *Wall Street Journal* op-ed article. Coleman's subcommittee has initiated a series of investigations into the OFF;

Silencing Dissent

For the Bush administration, the constitutionally guaranteed right to free speech does not apply to writers living in countries under U.S. trade embargo.

On October 26, Iranian human rights activist and 2003 Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi joined several publishing groups, including the American PEN Center and Arcade Publishing, in filing a lawsuit against the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). The lawsuit protests regulations that prohibit Ebadi and other foreign writers from being published in the United States.

According to the regulations, OFAC must approve the publication of new works by all authors who reside in countries facing U.S. trade sanctions, such as Iran, Sudan and Cuba. Publishing houses who fail to gain such approval could face up to \$1 million in fines; individuals both fines and up to 10 years in prison.

"Countries currently under U.S. trade embargo routinely prevent important work by writers and scholars from seeing the light of day," said Salman Rushdie, PEN American Center president, in a September 27 press release. "American writers, translators and publishers are being told that unless they get a license from OFAC, they may not work with their censored colleagues in these countries to bring these works into print."

OFAC's regulations are based on an interpretation of the 1917 Trading with the Enemies Act (TWEA) that granted Congress the power to regulate business transactions during times of war. However, two Congressional amendments since that time—the 1988 Berman Amendment and the 1994 Free Trade in Ideas Amendment—clearly state that the TWEA does not apply to the exchange of information.

"If even people like me – those who advocate peace and dialogue – are denied the right to publish their books in the United States with the assistance of Americans," Ebadi wrote in a November 16 *New York Times* op-ed piece, "then people will seriously question the view of the United States as a country that advocates democracy and freedom everywhere."

—Helen Walls

in the article he blamed Kofi Annan for the corruption he has supposedly uncovered. He also made the unsupportable but damning claim that Hussein's stolen billions are funding the current insurgency in Iraq, writing that "our troops would probably not have been placed in such danger if the United Nations had done its job in administering the sanctions and oil for food." Coleman concluded by calling for Kofi Annan's resignation: "As long as Mr. Annan remains in charge, the world will never be able to learn the full extent of the bribes, kickbacks and under-the-table payments that took place under the United Nations' collective nose."

Coleman's crusade has a lot of support. A House of Representatives resolution calling for Annan's resignation in order to "restore confidence" in the United Nations as an institution has 52 signatures. Companion bills in the House and Senate propose withholding a percentage of U.S. dues to the United Nations until it cooperates with a congressional investigation, separate from Volcker's investigation.

But members on both side of the aisle oppose these punitive acts. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) recently expressed his confidence that Volcker, a "smart guy, and tough," will carry out a "full and complete investigation." Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.), the ranking Democrat on Coleman's subcommittee, called the attack on Annan "unwarranted and unfair."

Levin is right. Conservative attempts to blame Kofi Annan obscure many facts—chiefly that the Secretariat did not oversee the OFF. The Security Council created the program and was responsible for its policing. The United States is one of the council's five permanent members.

If Annan should not be held responsible, then who should?

The evidence points to Washington. The skimming, smuggling and kick-backing that occurred under the OFF appears to be small compared with the amount of revenue Saddam Hussein generated through illegal government-to-government transactions with Jordan, Syria and Turkey that had the tacit approval of Congress and the White House under Presidents H.W. Bush and Clinton.

The Duelfer report found that Jordan inked \$4.5 billion in oil deals with Saddam Hussein, making it Baghdad's single largest source of revenue besides the OFF and the "key to Iraq's financial survival." This trade was unauthorized but formally acknowledged by a Security Council concerned

that Jordan's economy might collapse without access to the oil. Illegal trade with Turkey generated \$710 million for Saddam Hussein. Despite the fact that Washington knew that both these allies were illegally aiding the Hussein regime, Congress continued to release billions in military aid to Jordan and Turkey.

"With Turkey, it was plain illegal," explained David Mack, deputy assistant secretary of state for Near East Affairs during the period, to *The Associated Press*. "It was smuggling, but everybody just said, 'Oh well, geez, it was too hard to try to do anything about that.'"

Including the \$2.8 billion in Iraqi trading with Syria, Duelfer's report estimated that about \$8 billion of the \$11 billion in total illicit revenue was generated by these trade deals. Kofi Annan couldn't stop them, the Security Council looked the other way and Congress implicitly green-lighted them for years.

The rest of the illicit money was generated through a complex system whereby the Hussein regime overpaid contractors for food and other humanitarian goods, only to be repaid in cash. Searching for instances of this abuse is like looking for a needle in a haystack. But according to Joy Gordon, a professor at Fairfield University and author of a forthcoming book on the sanctions against Iraq, on more than 70 occasions evidence was brought to the Security Council body charged with implementing the sanctions.

In the December issue of *Harper's*, Gordon noted that "In not a single instance did the United States choose to block any transaction due to suspected kickbacks." While apparently unconcerned with evidence of Hussein's exploitation of the program, U.S. contract examiners were vigilant about dual-use items, blocking billions of dollars in humanitarian contracts because of concerns that they could have some military application. In July 2002 alone, the United States had placed nearly \$5 billion of these contracts on hold.

If Coleman and other members of Congress want to hold someone accountable, they could start by cleaning out their own house and examining the continued practice of providing billions in military aid to nations like Jordan and Turkey that act at cross purposes with U.S. foreign policy. That's the real scandal. ■

FRIDA BERRIGAN is a senior research associate with the Arms Trade Resource Center, a project of the World Policy Institute.

APPALL-O-METER

4.7 I Saw Santa Smacking Grandma

Those who don the jolly red suit and false beard during Yuletide seem to be getting more and more deviant. The BBC reports that police had to use night sticks and mace to break up a street brawl involving dozens of drunken Santas at a charity event in Wales.

And then there was the surly Santa observed on the streets of Atlanta, whaling on a 74-year-old woman with a two-by-four. According to WIS-TV, little was known about the incident except that the woman had been handing out religious literature and the Santa was doing something with a bag of chocolate. "She was stealing my stuff," the man complained after being arrested. "I asked 10 to 15 times not to touch my stuff."

4.4 Oh, that Peculiar Institution!

"Slave life was to them a life of plenty, of simple pleasures, of food, clothes, and good medical care." So asserts the booklet "Southern Slavery, As It Was," a classroom text designed for faith-based instruction. Authors Douglas Wilson and Steve Wilkins, a pair of fundagelical educators, also explain that the Bible permits slave-owning (a red state tradition) but condemns slave-trading (a blue state vice). Slavery wasn't "perfect or sinless," the authors allow, but come on, those folks just loved massuh.

One institution that

adopted the text, according to the *News & Observer* of North Carolina, was Cary Christian School, the fast-growing Christian school in the "Triangle" area around Raleigh-Durham. After the paper examined the text, Cary Christian withdrew it from the 9th grade curriculum, citing faulty footnotes and citations. "We apologize for this oversight and covet your prayers for our school," administrators wrote to parents.



4.6 Oy to the World!

'Tis the season to persecute Christians, apparently. The howling jingoes of cable TV are hot with indignation over fresh attempts by liberal secularists across the land to bar carolers from public schools, ban crèches from municipal buildings, and enforce other strictures tantamount to "hate crime" (as Pat Buchanan put it recently).

The president of the Catholic League even ventured the opinion that the whole thing is a plot by you-know-who. "Hollywood is controlled by secular Jews who hate Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular," William Donohue told Buchanan on MSNBC's "Scarborough Country." "It's not a secret, OK? And I'm not afraid to say it."

"Hollywood likes anal sex," Donohue continued, not revealing his sources. "They like to see the public square without nativity scenes. I like families. I like children. They like abortions. We have nothing in common. But you know what? The culture war has been ongoing for a long time. Their side has lost."

And a happy New Year!

—Dave Mulcahey

Lockout KO'd

San Francisco hotel workers triumph with help from city-by-city support. *By David Bacon*

THE FIVE-WEEK SAN Francisco hotel lockout was fought by workers who wanted to "level the playing field," in the words of Elena Duran, a room cleaner at the city's Hilton. Inspired by the idea of unions in many cities around the country sitting down at the same time with the giant hotel operators, they demanded a common contract expiration date in 2006. And although those operators had agreed to that date in eight cities, in San Francisco they drew the line.

The idea was "a non-starter," says Barbara French, speaking for the Multi-Employer Group (MEG), which bargains for 14 of the city's largest establishments, including corporations like Hilton, Intercontinental, Starwood and Hyatt that manage hotel properties around the country and the world.

When workers wouldn't take the demand off the table, MEG said they couldn't come back to work until they did. UNITE HERE Local 2 not only didn't fold—it began to implement the very strategy of city-to-city cooperation that the hotel chains were so afraid of.

Chicago was one of the first cities to mount a one-day walkout of the union hotels managed by the same corporations battling workers in San Francisco. Henry Tamarin, president of Chicago's UNITE HERE Local 1, wrote a letter to the city's labor movement, calling on them to boycott the Intercontinental and the Four Seasons for the same reason. "If workers in San Francisco, Los Angeles or Washington, D.C. make concessions to their multinational operators," he

warned, "our Chicago families will soon feel them too."

This fall, when negotiations started in San Francisco for a new contract, MEG proposed tiny wage increases and big hikes in medical insurance payments—up to \$273 a month. But the key issue at stake was Local 2's proposal that a new agreement expire in 2006, part of an effort to form a common front of workers in major urban hotel markets.

In September the union launched a limited two-week strike against four MEG member hotels. The operators then locked the workers out of their other 10 hotels and announced they'd extend the lockout beyond the strike's end, so long as the expiration date was on the table.

UNITE HERE, however, turned the lockout into a weapon against the operators. The 4,300 locked-out laborers mounted large, boisterous picket lines. Bullhorns blasted picketers' chants into the streets, and up into the hotel rooms, from early morning until after midnight. Union members ate on the lines, often bringing their children with them. They reflected San Francisco's diversity, with all of the city's racial groups and languages represented. Some conventions pulled out of picketed hotels, while guests at others complained about disruption inside, or just refused to cross the lines.

When operators brought in strikebreakers from hotels in other cities, the union extended its picket lines to Chicago, Honolulu and Monterey, California, provoking one-day shutdowns that foreshadowed



Protesters rally against lockout.

DAVID BACON

what a multi-city campaign in 2006 might mean.

Finally, the union turned to the city itself. The Board of Supervisors held a hearing in which hundreds of workers overflowed City Hall. Despite the fact the Local 2 had endorsed his opponent in last year's election, Mayor Gavin Newsom decided to try to settle the dispute. But when he asked the hotels to end the lockout, they turned him down flat, and then criticized him publicly. Matt Adams, head of MEG, wondered aloud to the *San Francisco Chronicle* why the candidate, whose campaign they'd financed, was not taking their side without question.

Newsom pulled city business from the hotels. As complaints mounted from businesses surrounding the noisy picket lines, he also pulled the police away, pointing out that the operators could end the ruckus any time they liked. As the workers' health insurance was set to expire, the city hospital union, SEIU Local 250, convinced the workers' HMO to extend it.

The state announced that since Local 2 members were locked out, they'd receive unemployment benefits.

After five weeks, the operators finally let the workers return to their jobs, with no agreement on their demand that they give up the 2006 contract expiration date. When workers learned about the decision, many were even reluctant to take the lines down, since they'd proven so effective.

The union, while it agreed not to strike for 60 days, announced it would continue the rest of its effective pressure campaign, including boycotts of the 14 hotels. The operators still have deep reserves, and the hotels will function unhindered through their busiest season. But MEG's grand strategy to stop the union's march toward greater bargaining leverage has unraveled. ■

DAVID BACON is a California labor writer and photographer. His most recent book is *The Children*

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IN 2003, AN UNPRECEDENTED 750,000 Americans wrote the Federal Communications Commission, urging them not to relax media ownership rules. Since then, the movement to reshape national media policy has gained momentum, and the media reform organization Free Press (www.freepress.net) has been instrumental every step of the way.

Free Press is building on bipartisan concerns about media concentration by helping to organize a series of hearings that allow citizens to speak directly to FCC commissioners Jonathan Adelstein and Michael Copps. They eventually hope to hold similar hearings in all 50 states.

In These Times spoke with Free Press founder and In These Times contributing editor Robert McChesney about current media reform battles and the challenges of getting the word out about crucial but highly technical communications policy issues.

What are the next steps in the media reform movement?

One of our biggest campaigns is to establish community broadband wireless around the country. This is an extraordinary new technology that allows towns, communities and neighborhoods to set up their own non-commercial, non-profit, public utility wireless system. The big concern we have is that the telecom and cable companies are trying to get laws passed that don't let city governments set up their own systems and allow these cable, DSL and phone companies to reserve the rights to broadband.

These are the sort of tangible, winnable fights we're having in every state now. We only lose when we don't organize and the powerful corporate lobbies get their way behind closed doors.

We're also fighting to get low-power FM radio stations on the dial across the country. I think we'll win that fight if enough people organize.

Every progressive organization struggles to get its message out beyond its core group of supporters. How do we get the media reform message out to people in rural areas of this country?

Media reform activists are not going to get much coverage in the news media itself because the media clearly has a vested interest in the way these stories are covered.

The Internet has become a crucial tool for us. One of the lessons of the media ownership fight of 2003 was how we could use the new technologies to really build up a strong mass movement without relying on much conventional news media coverage. I don't think the Internet by itself is satisfactory, but it has allowed us to do some relatively inexpensive organizing that

would have probably been very difficult 10, 15, 20 years ago. We also do hard, on-the-ground organizing on issues that matter in the community. For example, we've organized hearings in Texas and South Dakota that were overwhelmingly attended by Latinos and Native Americans who very concerned about local media. Campaigns to get malt liquor advertising out of a working-class neighborhood's billboard advertising, or advertising out of the schools, are the sorts of things that you can organize in communities that are

sympathetic to your cause but largely oblivious to you.

In the media reform movement we're fortunate because the greatest weaknesses of the corporate media system is that it's increasingly unprofitable to do local coverage, especially in poor areas and rural areas. So, rural media has really collapsed in the last 20 years of corporate media concentration. There's an understanding across the political spectrum that there is a problem here. We have to find tangible issues to work around and then work through farmers' organizations and other agricultural groups. They're already organized in those areas and we need to draw them into our struggle.

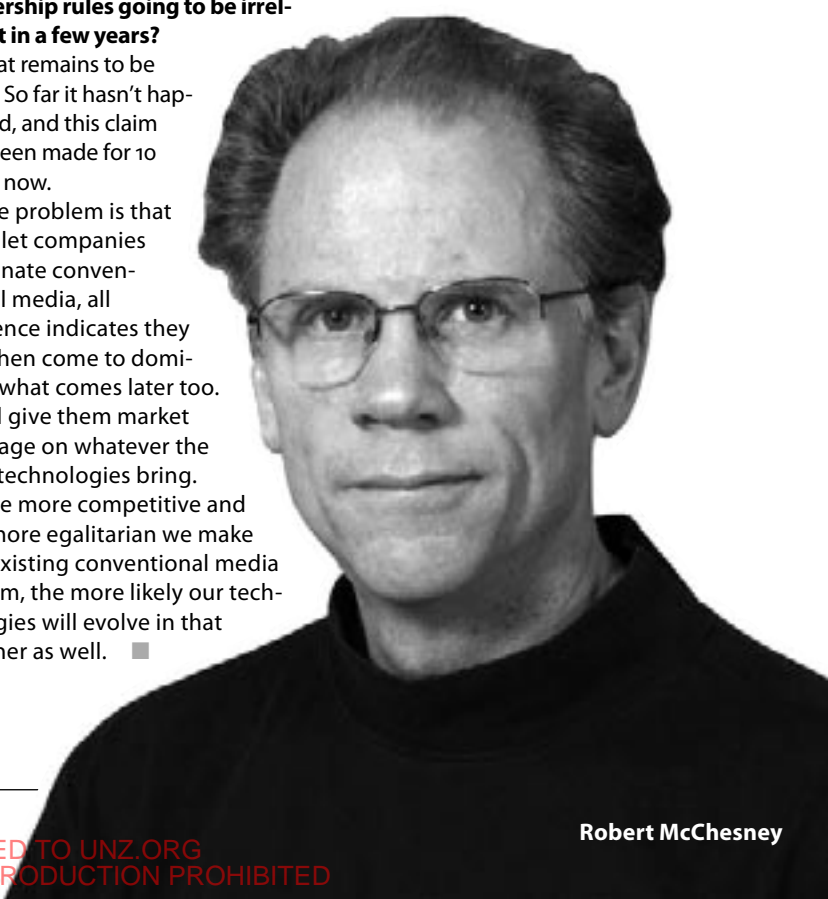
The Internet has vastly changed how people consume media in this country. Are some of the media ownership rules going to be irrelevant in a few years?

That remains to be seen. So far it hasn't happened, and this claim has been made for 10 years now.

The problem is that if we let companies dominate conventional media, all evidence indicates they will then come to dominate what comes later too. It will give them market leverage on whatever the new technologies bring. So the more competitive and the more egalitarian we make our existing conventional media system, the more likely our technologies will evolve in that manner as well. ■

For a longer audio version of this interview, visit In These Times' radio program, "Fire on the Prairie," at www.fireontheprairie.com.

The full text of this interview will appear in Punk Planet #66, on newsstands in late February.



Robert McChesney



Gary Webb, Word Warrior

IN SEPTEMBER 1998, *ESQUIRE* RAN AN ARTICLE chronicling the sad saga of investigative journalist Gary Webb, who had uncovered a story of government skullduggery that proved to be too vast for his own good. Webb's big story was a three-part series arguing that the CIA was complicit with right-wing Nicaraguan Contras as they sold the cocaine that accelerated the crack-cocaine epidemic. One of the subheadlines of the *Esquire* article was "A Good Man Destroyed."

Six years later, on December 10, 2004, the 49-year-old Webb died by a self-inflicted gunshot to the head.

Webb's controversial series, which appeared in the *San Jose Mercury News* during August 1996, detailed how the Contras sold tons of cocaine to the Crips and Bloods street gangs and used the profits to finance their terrorist campaign against Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government. He provided a well-researched and powerfully written chronicle of how anti-communist fervor got our government involved in helping to propagate one of the most damaging drug epidemics in modern history.

The black community was particularly outraged by the information contained in Webb's stories, which were widely circulated on the Internet. The crack-cocaine epidemic had spread across black America, wreaking devastation in its wake. Charges that both the FBI and CIA were out to get blacks have long circulated within the African-American community, and the *Mercury News* series alleging CIA involvement in this deadly epidemic resonated strongly.

Ever since a congressional investigation revealed the scope of the government's COINTELPRO program, which was intended to "expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit or otherwise neutralize" black leaders across the political spectrum, black activist organizations have cast a wary eye toward federal intelligence agencies. And, in fact, some radical groups long had charged the government was proliferating drugs as a form of "chemical warfare," to demobilize black activism. Webb's series seemed to corroborate all of this and he was hailed as a hero by many in the black community. Webb told me that such adulation made him very uncomfortable.

Although some of the information he uncovered had been disclosed by Robert Parry and Brian Barger in a number of 1985 AP stories and in previous congressional probes, Webb's series connected the dots in a way that was easily understandable. An energized movement of African-American black activists demanded the CIA come clean and insisted that their

representatives initiate congressional investigations of Webb's charges.

These strident demands for probes provoked a governmental counterattack. CIA director John Deutch was even dispatched to South-Central Los Angeles to patch up the agency's PR problem in the black community. The corporate media also began to weigh in with their skeptical accounts of Webb's series.

The *Washington Post*, *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* all ganged up on Webb and forced his *Mercury Times* editor to withdraw support for the series in a front-page editorial. The editor then changed Webb's status from investigative reporter and reassigned him to a distant bureau, miles away from his family. Webb quit the paper.

Much of the elite media's zeal to debunk Webb was fueled by the need to justify their own journalistic malfeasance. Contra-cocaine connection stories were ignored by the mainstream news shops and even when Sen. John Kerry's committee released a 1989 report condemning CIA-Contra-cocaine connections, the corporate media took a pass.

That's not to say that Webb's series was entirely without fault. It turned out he overestimated the impact of the Contras' cocaine dealing on the crack epidemic and may have been a little loose with the term CIA agent. But his major point of CIA collusion with Contra drug dealers remained unblunted.

In fact, the CIA's own Inspector General's office published its investigation of the charges in a 1998 report that admitted the agency "continued to work with about two dozen Nicaraguan rebels and their supporters during the 1980s, despite allegations they were trafficking in drugs." This report was prompted by Webb's "Dark Alliance" newspaper series. Not surprisingly, this 1998 report was given short shrift in the corporate media.

Webb later wrote a book, *Dark Alliance: The CIA, the Contras and the Crack Cocaine Explosion*, published in 1998 by Seven Stories Press and excerpted in *In These Times*, that consolidated much of his reportage and added important tidbits. The appearance of this book in tandem with the CIA Inspector General's report was well timed; it was Webb's dogged journalism that forced the CIA to investigate its own crimes, however feebly.

Were it not for this courageous word warrior, cocaine-peddling Contras would still be publicly dismissed as just another conspiracy theory purveyed by paranoids. Gary Webb, many thanks. ■

It was Webb's dogged journalism that forced the CIA to investigate its own crimes.

SALIM MUWAKKIL is a senior editor at *In These Times*, a contributing columnist to the *Chicago Tribune* and a *Crime and Communities Media Fellow* of the *Open Society Institute*.



Viewpoint *By Jeff Epton*

Antiwar Action: Back to the '60s?

Antiwar groups have to face the fact that the occupation continues and that 2003's unprecedented worldwide peace mobilization did little to slow the drive to war.

THE ANTIWAR GROUPS ORIGINALLY FORMED TO oppose the invasion of Iraq took a variety of different positions during this election year. Some condemned both major parties as two sides of the same war party, but urged members to vote anyway. Others, sharing some of the same reservations about the major candidates, were more ambitious, running their own voter registration and get-out-the-vote campaigns. Either way, antiwar groups have to face the fact that the occupation continues and that 2003's unprecedented worldwide peace mobilization did little to slow the drive to war.

Chicagoans Against War and Injustice (CAWI) has big plans for next steps. CAWI co-chairs Marilyn Katz and Carl Davidson recently wrote "The Road Ahead After 2004," a document aimed at guiding discussion of political strategy (www.noiraqwar-chicago.org).

CAWI "deputized and trained nearly 1,000 registrars in Chicago and the suburbs; and, working with some close allies, brought in nearly 20,000 new voters. Hundreds of CAWI members and affiliates traveled and made phone banking calls to other states—gaining valuable skills and experience," they wrote. "If we allow all these gains to slip through our fingers, we will have been little more than a tail on the Democratic Party."

Formed to connect peace and justice groups across the country, New York-based United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) has a more national focus. Hoping to avoid sectarian splits within its coalition, UFPJ did not engage in voter registration or mobilization during the recent election. Instead, member groups focused on educating people about the impact of the war. Some groups outlined strong anti-Bush positions, but endorsed third party candidates, rather than support John Kerry.

UFPJ plans to continue its focus on the war. "The problem is the war isn't ending," says Leslie Cagan, UFPJ's national coordinator. "Our member groups are considering proposals to launch a major organizing drive run by local groups, reaching out to people we've never reached before." Some UFPJ groups will move beyond "street heat" to "interfere with the war machine," says Cagan, invoking a '60s-style phrase.

By aiming at new and larger constituencies, CAWI and UFPJ recognize the need to inject new vigor into the left's old organizing traditions. One obstacle to the

change they envision is our electoral system. As James Weinstein, *In These Times* founding editor, writes in his book *The Long Detour*:

The presidential system favors the wealthy and powerful because winning a nationwide election requires massive amounts of money and a subservient corporate media. Of course, a political movement with a large well-organized, popular network of experienced people dedicated to a long-range struggle, might offset that advantage.

Weinstein explores the history of progressive third party organizing in the United States, and he outlines the obstacles a "wanna-be" movement must confront. No matter what issues a movement addresses, he writes, the central imperative "is to pursue a path that brings supporters together."

That means moving beyond a few hundred thousand activists and an estimated 10 to 15 million reliably progressive voters. But a movement like UFPJ may encounter difficulty reaching new audiences with a style that rings a back-to-the-'60s note. That note, as Weinstein observes, is flawed by more than mere nostalgia:

In the New Left, as in the old, style, rhetoric, and the degree of commitment and self-sacrifice also became the badges of radicalism. Few New Leftists were concerned about the class nature of American society, fewer still about the need to gain political power.

CAWI's strategy of building an infrastructure that can support and accommodate people moving in and out of political life may accomplish political outreach more effectively. Such a strategy recognizes the workplace and family commitments that make constant political engagement difficult for far too many Americans.

One of the explanations for Kerry's defeat was his failure to speak persuasively about these economic realities. Had he convincingly addressed poverty-level wages, rising unemployment, job anxiety, lack of access to health care, the longest work day and the longest commute in the industrialized world and other economic issues, Kerry surely would have attracted more voters. A constituency constantly distracted by such matters has little time for candidates who barely mention them. An antiwar agenda that doesn't address such issues isn't likely to fare any better. ■



JEFF EPTON
is the publisher of
In These Times



A Test of Values

IT'S NO WONDER SOME AMERICANS SEEM CONTENT to view gay people through the blurry lens of moral judgment. Those who lecture on values rather than listen to facts might be struck dumb if they looked more closely at the lives of real individuals and the struggles they've endured.

Take former Airman First Class Robert Firpo, a 24-year-old Mormon from Washington state who now makes his home near the nation's capital. His fellow Mormons and loyal veterans would not believe the ordeal of his early adulthood—much less that it happened at taxpayers' expense, implicated both church and state, and left him without recourse. Indeed, it offends any sense of patriotism: Firpo, like 10,000 fellow service members in the past decade, has seen his talent and training wasted, and his torment compounded by being punished for his own persecution.

Antigay discrimination takes a toll on the very forces dedicated to destroying intolerant terrorists like al Qaeda. Such hatred is the target of a federal lawsuit, filed by 12 former soldiers in conjunction with the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN) that renews the fight to lift the ban on openly gay members of the armed services.

The Pentagon's ban on gays, dubbed "don't ask, don't tell," is a farce. Commanders and investigators routinely and coercively violate the first premise. The ban suffered a blow in December, when a military appeals court nixed a sodomy judgment against a heterosexual soldier. The ruling cited the 2003 Supreme Court decision that nullified state sodomy laws and denounced those that singled out gay people. A similar sodomy law has, until now, survived in military code—a cornerstone for the policy of ferreting out and expelling gay people from the ranks.

This policy seems even crueler in the face of the determination of soldiers, like Firpo, who continue serving even as the military intimidatingly and humiliatingly pries into their lives. He is not a plaintiff in the SLDN case, but his story speaks volumes about values such as honesty, integrity, public service and perseverance—and the failure of religious and military officials to destroy them.

Enlisting in the Air Force in 1998 to learn Korean and thereby fill a void in our nation's global security apparatus, Firpo landed at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California. He showed promise and emerged as a leader of his group. Firpo had

already faced interrogation over his sexual orientation during basic training, according to an SLDN report. But at Monterey the meanness intensified. His fellow trainees, taking a cue from commanding officers, repeatedly asked him if he was "a fag." Goaded by teachers and an officer who told him he should be in jail, other airmen stepped up their harassment. Desperate for help, he sought out a chaplain, who told him to "grow up" and "correct" his behavior. On the note board of his barracks room, he received more than 100 messages threatening him.

Cut off from his family, which wasn't speaking to him, and in the process of being excommunicated from the Mormon church, Firpo filed a complaint against the chaplain and another officer. In response, he was assigned duties working with the very same officers. A guard was stationed at his barracks, and then he was moved into a tinier room to be supervised by peers. Reduced to what he literally calls "a closet" and under constant scrutiny, Firpo broke down.

He was sent to a civilian hospital. In a throwback to an earlier era's labels for the stress that results from isolation and cruelty, he was diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic. Even with a health-related discharge in the works, Firpo faced the added threat of military prosecution on five charges, including sodomy. "How they might have proved that is beyond me," Firpo says. "They must just use their imaginations." (Indeed, the charges were dropped.)

"The policy of don't-ask, don't-tell enforces silence. The silence creates fear, which triggers cruelty. That's the worst torture for people who are or think they might be gay," he says.

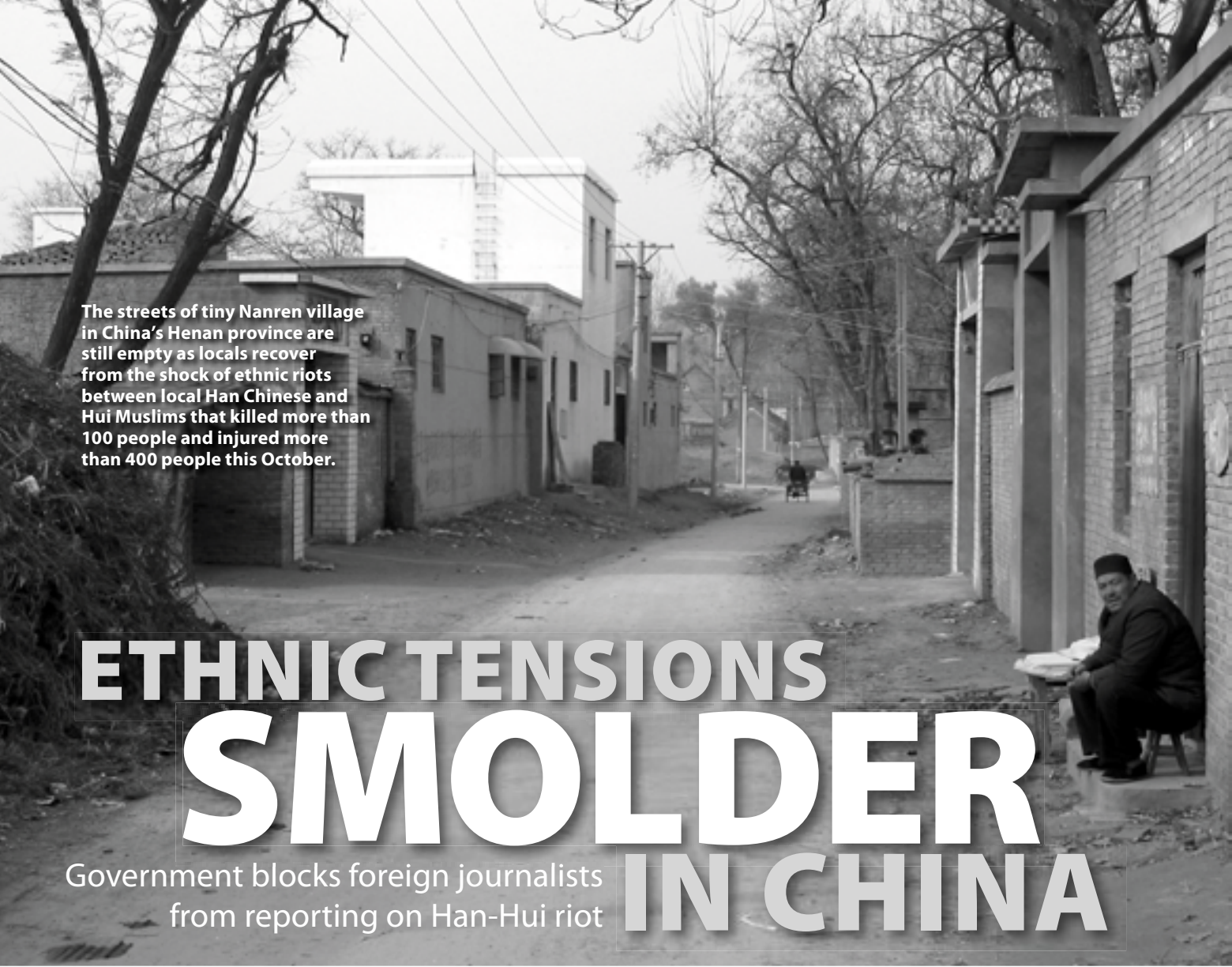
Turning around the chief argument of ban defenders, he adds, "It's also an assault on unit cohesion, by forcing people to hide and be dishonest and unfamiliar."

Looking ahead, he wants to visit his parents, who live in a small town where they fear for their own jobs, worrying that colleagues might find out about their son. Later, he wants to go back to school to get a degree in music education. "What I've gone through has made me patient with other people," he says.

Little in the upbeat tone or energetic gaze of Robert Firpo suggests the battle-hardened character beneath. Maybe that's the point. The strongest values speak in a still, small voice such that pundits and preachers alike need only hush to hear. ■

Antigay discrimination takes a toll on the very forces dedicated to destroying intolerant terrorists like al Qaeda.

HANS JOHNSON
writes regularly on religion and politics for In These Times



The streets of tiny Nanren village in China's Henan province are still empty as locals recover from the shock of ethnic riots between local Han Chinese and Hui Muslims that killed more than 100 people and injured more than 400 people this October.

ETHNIC TENSIONS SMOLDER IN CHINA

Government blocks foreign journalists from reporting on Han-Hui riot

BY JEHANGIR S. POCHA · NANREN, CHINA

THE SILENCE IN THIS DUSTY brick-making town seems idyllic. But it's really the calm after a storm—a storm that residents fear will soon return.

"Everyone here's gone mad. ... people who used to live together now want to kill each other," says a local restaurant owner who would give his name only as Mr. Ma. "I'm worried that when the police leave the fighting will start again."

On October 28, this small village of about 1500 Han Chinese and 500 Hui Muslims in China's central Henan province exploded into violence after a minor altercation between members of the two communities.

Little has been reported on the flare-up. The government is determined to suppress news of the riot because "it wants to preserve the image that all minorities live hap-

pily in China," says Ma. While more than 90 percent of China is Han, the country has more than 50 ethnic minorities, including different Muslim groups, Tibetans, Koreans and Mongolians.

A small spark

Ma, a Hui, said the violence broke out after a Hui man was attacked by Han locals. Han Chinese in the area say the man was beaten after he knocked down a Han girl with his vehicle and refused to pay compensation.

Fighting between the two communities raged for hours, Ma says, leaving more than 100 dead, more than 400 injured, and several houses and vehicles burned.

Word of the riot spread quickly in the region, threatening to draw thousands more into the frenzy, thanks to the cell phones and

computers proliferating even in rural China.

"Thousands of [Han] people surrounded [Nanren village] with bulldozers and tractors and wanted to smash all the Hui houses," says Zhujian Jun, 32, a carpenter in Zhongmou, a town about 20 miles south of Nanren.

In Ji Yuan, about 80 miles to the west, "thousands of Hui people were getting into trucks to go join the fight," says Yuan Peng, a Hui man in Ji Yuan. Rumors also spread about a planeload of Huis flying in from the northern province of Ningxia, an officially designated Hui autonomous region, where about 2 million of China's 8.2 million Hui live.

Local authorities moved quickly to quell the violence, but it was so ferocious that at least 15 policemen were killed before officials called in special paramilitary troops, sources say.

Contained rage

Now surveillance vans still patrol the area and a large blue sign assures locals that a special detachment of the police is working to clear up the problem.

That's the most public concession that anything is amiss here.

Chinese media have hardly reported the violence, and foreign journalists are still banned from entering the area. Those caught trying are detained by authorities. Local residents have also been explicitly warned against talking to journalists, Ma says, to explain why he kept glancing out at the street as he spoke.

With the area isolated from the outside and the government seen to be sweeping

he agreed to speak. "Just look around you. All the Hui restaurants are empty because people aren't supporting their businesses."

Many of the Han taxi drivers and hawkers in the town, who work late into the night, say their wives now insist on coming to work with them, for fear of Hui reprisals.

Such unrest is rooted in an increasing alienation amongst people who feel sidelined by the government's single-minded pursuit of economic growth and the resultant increase in inequality, autocracy and corruption, says Jiang Yang, 42, a business executive in Beijing.

"In this hostile, strained environment it's only natural that ethnic relations will also decay," Jiang says. "Today Chinese people

the first decades of Communist rule, when the Party repressed practice of all faiths.

"People [now] come in droves to pray five times a day ... and we are even getting new converts," says Lu Da Zhe An, a cleric at the newly built Arabian-style mosque in Shui Yun, a Hui village not far from Nanren.

Ironically this relatively greater religious freedom is also heightening differences between Han and Hui, says Mai Bao Guang, a local butcher in Shui Yun. He, like many Hui, has recently taken to wearing a beard and an Arabic-style white prayer hat.

According to Mai, such increased devoutness and the Huis' tendency to congregate in and around mosques has made them seem even more clannish to many Han Chinese.

Unrest is rooted in an increasing alienation amongst people who feel sidelined by the Chinese government's single-minded pursuit of economic growth and the resulting increase in inequality, autocracy and corruption.

things under the carpet, both Han and Hui communities in the area continue to seethe.

"We're good Muslims but the Han people don't understand us," says Yuan Zong Qing, a truck driver in Ji Yuan. "They have complicated ways and try to impose this on us. Our children cannot learn the Koran in school, and it's hard for them to even observe Ramadan. Some [Han Chinese] offer us pork and intimidate us and pressure us to keep Chinese names." Yuan prefers to call himself by his Arab name, Mohammad Dawood.

In Zhongmou, a Han carpenter named Wang Tong Bin says he's "always hated" the Hui because they're "arrogant, aggressive and clannish. They have this group mentality, so if one Han person offends a Hui person, a lot of Hui will collect to take revenge."

Rising resentment

Such bitterness, prejudice and anger is grinding away at China's steadily fraying social fabric. Almost 60,000 protests occurred around the country last year, the government says, more than five times the number that occurred a decade ago. Given local governments' reticence in reporting such information, the real number could well be higher.

For example, there was a Hui-Han riot in Zhongmou just this summer, says Wang Chao, a retired Han mill worker in the town.

"The city hasn't recovered yet," he says from the back seat of his car, the only place

have nothing to believe in. ... some are reaching for religion and some have made money their God."

Money, faith and fairness

Indeed, money and faith appear to be the primary causes of Hui-Han tensions.

The Chinese government has long tried to mollify its potentially restive minorities with sops such as jobs preferences and other affirmative action-type schemes. But with unemployment rising, particularly in the rural central and western provinces, the Han majority is increasingly resentful.

"Everyone should be equal in our society," says Wang, the carpenter. "If the Hui are really as superior to us as they claim why do they need extra things from the government?"

Ma scoffed at the idea that the Hui received any real benefits from the government. "If that's so, why are all the men inside the vans Han and not Hui?" he asks, pointing to the street outside where police surveillance vans trawl the streets looking for troublemakers.

Hui men often complain that they and other Muslim minorities have few "real jobs," and are limited to owning restaurants in the local "minority street," where they serve patrons piping-hot kebobs and flaky nan bread.

But there is no doubt the Hui now enjoy far more religious freedom than they did in

Struggling with civic structures

Such social tensions, in combination with other political unrest, are ringing alarm bells in the corridors of power where "maintaining social stability" is the holiest of official mantras—not surprising in a nation almost destroyed by social tumult during the last century.

Alarmed Communist Party of China elders have responded the only way they know—by directing officials to be more responsive and considerate in their governance.

But Chinese and foreign political analysts in Beijing say that's not enough. Since the Chinese government has only recently withdrawn from many spheres of public life, Chinese society hasn't really had a chance to learn how to manage competing social interests. So the grassroots mechanisms that open societies rely on to sort out similar ethnic or social tensions must be given time and support to develop, says Chen Xin, a professor of sociology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

From the back of his car Wang, the mill worker, says his life seems to be gradually spinning outside the government's, and his, control. "I have a Hui friend and we used to eat and go out together," he says. "Now I'm not sure if I can. I don't want things to change, but I can't help it if they do." ■

JEHANGIR POCHA is the Asia correspondent for *In These Times*.



THE STORY PROCTER &
GAMBLE CENSORED

How Mercury Damages Fet

LAST SPRING, I RECEIVED A TANTALIZING INVITATION FROM THE EDITOR of *Childbirth Forum*: write a story on mercury in fish and the resulting risks to pregnant women. This was a topic dear to my heart. During the four years I researched fetal toxicology at Cornell University, I had become alarmed about the breach between what the scientific community knows about the effects of prenatal mercury exposure (a lot) and what the general public knows (very little).

Pregnant myself during some of this time, I experienced this disconnect directly. I spent one Valentine's Day poring through the data that inform the Food and Drug Administration's ongoing recommendation that pregnant women avoid swordfish. Then I joined my husband for a meal in a nearby restaurant. I was hardly seated when the waiter suggested to me—so pregnant I couldn't pull my chair up to the table—the swordfish special. Behind the bar was a sign warning pregnant women that alcohol can cause birth defects. No sign appeared in the menu warning pregnant women that mercury in certain fish can cause fetal brain damage.

The book I eventually wrote on environmental threats to pregnancy devotes two chapters to mercury. It was this book, *Having Faith: An Ecologist's Journey to Motherhood*, that prompted Alice Berman, editor of *Childbirth Forum*, to solicit my article.

I said yes. Sponsored by Pampers diapers, the magazine has a print run of 20,000, and most of its readers are nurses who work as childbirth educators, an audience I had long wished to reach. So, with my own childbirth instructor in mind, I traced the flow of mercury through the human food chain, starting with its introduction into the atmosphere and ending with its presence in tuna fish sandwiches. I finished my story before the deadline. The editor liked it. It went out for external review. The reviewers liked it. The story was accepted for publication.

At about the time I started checking my mailbox for copies, I found out my article would not be published after all. In an apologetic e-mail, Berman forwarded me the following message, which she said she had received from the group that handles the publication's production: "Although the feature is relevant, well-researched, and well-written, it cannot be used for *Childbirth Forum* at this time based on a directive from the newsletter's sponsor, Procter & Gamble. ... The information about mercury and fish must be written about in a larger context of diet during pregnancy, and is too 'controversial' to feature as it is."

I'm a biologist. I always thought that the food chain was our diet. But maybe I'm missing something. You tell me. Here is the story, "Mercury in Pregnancy: Eat Fish With Caution," that Procter & Gamble doesn't want the teachers of pregnant women to read:

IN THESE TIMES

Mercury-Tainted Tuna Poisons Fetal Brains

By Sandra Steingraber

FISH IS THE LAST FORM OF WILDLIFE MANY AMERICANS STILL eat. Those who seldom dine on stewed squirrel or venison may be very familiar with tuna salad.

And fish is good food. It is low in saturated fat and high in protein. It is also a leading source of omega-3 fatty acids, which reduce blood pressure. These same nutrients help build healthy brains in our children. During the second half of pregnancy, when the fetal brain undergoes a big growth spurt, omega-3 fatty acids are required for the proliferation of fetal neurons and blood vessels.

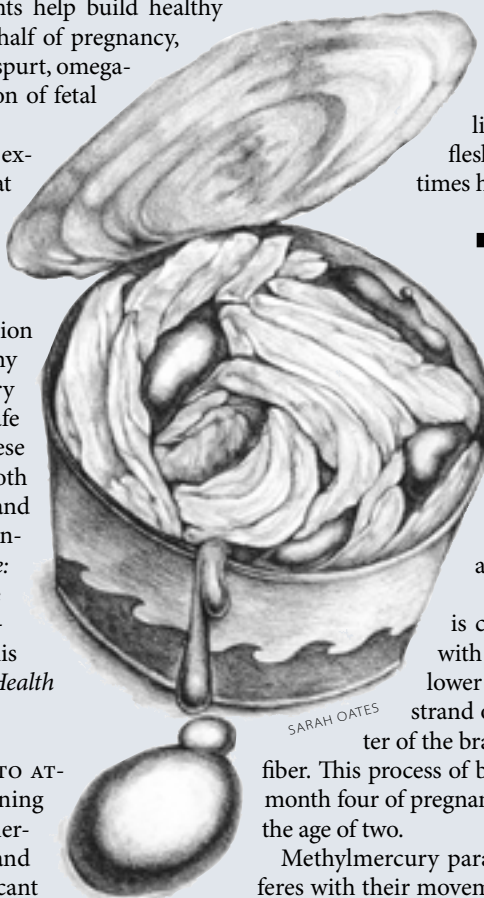
But eating fish is also the leading route of exposure to methylmercury. Women who eat fish more than twice a week have blood mercury levels that are seven times higher than women who eat no fish. And mercury, like lead, is a terrible saboteur of fetal brain growth. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently estimated that as many as 630,000 infants, or roughly one in every six U.S. babies, are born each year with unsafe levels of methylmercury in their blood. These revelations have ignited a fiery debate both about fish consumption during pregnancy and about how best to get mercury out of the environment in the first place. [Author's update: The EPA has taken pains not to adopt the 630,000 figure as its official position. Calculated by EPA scientist Kathryn Mahaffey, this estimate was published in *Environmental Health Perspectives*, April 2004.]

THE BIGGEST KNOWN CONTRIBUTORS TO ATMOSPHERIC MERCURY are coal-burning power plants, which put 50 tons of mercury into the air each year. Incinerators and some chlor-alkali facilities are also significant mercury polluters. Emissions from chlor-alkali facilities are a disputed number that is the subject of an ongoing lawsuit.

As a vapor, mercury circles the globe for up to a year, coming back down to earth with rain or snow. Once it lands, mercury is attached to carbon atoms by bacteria. This chemical transformation turns elemental mercury into a highly potent neurotoxin called methylmercury, which is the form of mercury found in fish.

Fish are vulnerable to methylmercury contamination because watery environments enhance the ability of this organic metal to biomagnify—meaning that it concentrates as it is siphoned up the food chain.

In water, toxic substances like methylmercury can reach higher levels because food chains are longer than they are on land. Terrestrial food chains rarely have more than three links. Aquatic ecosystems can easily support food chains with six links, and some have as many as twelve. Thus, a top predatory fish, like a tuna, can easily have sequestered in its flesh methylmercury levels that are a million times higher than the water it swam in.



THE PLACENTA, WHICH WORKS WELL TO bar pathogens from entering the womb, does a terrible job of keeping methylmercury out. In fact, the placenta actively pumps mercury into the fetal capillaries as though it were a precious molecule of calcium or iodine. This is why levels of mercury in the blood of a newborn typically exceed those of its mother by 70 percent. When confronted with methylmercury, the placenta functions more like a magnifying glass than a barrier.

Once inside the fetal blood supply, mercury is carried to the fetal brain, where it interferes with brain cell migration. Just as a spider can lower itself from the ceiling by reeling out a single strand of silk, a fetal brain cell moves from the center of the brain to the surface by rappelling along its own fiber. This process of brain cell migration begins in earnest during month four of pregnancy and continues after birth at least through the age of two.

Methylmercury paralyzes migrating brain cells and thus interferes with their movement from center to surface. Methylmercury also halts cell division in the fetal brain by binding directly to neural chromosomes. The cerebellum—center of balance and coordination—is a special target of methylmercury. Prenatal exposures to methylmercury have also been linked to deficits in memory, learning and attention span that persist into adolescence and appear irreversible.

In short, human fetuses are more vulnerable than adults to the brain-addling powers of mercury

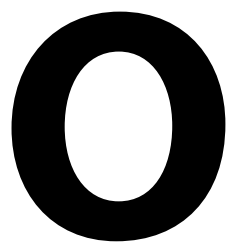
Continued on page 29

Turning Strangers into Political Friends

By Danielle Allen



JIM RINNERT AND SARAH OATES



of them thought so.

John Hart Ely wrote in *Democracy and Distrust* that the continuance of democracy depends on the meticulous cultivation among citizens of distrust in government. We should all, he argues, be so many jumpy watchdogs. On one level he's right. We citizens should cast a skeptical eye on all claims made by governing officials and hold them accountable for choices good and ill. But intellectual skepticism about policy is perfectly compatible with efforts to encourage citizens' trust of one another, and, more importantly, their trustworthiness in the eyes of others.

TRUST IN ONE'S FELLOW CITIZENS CONSISTS IN THE BELIEF, simply, that one is safe with them. This trust can be registered cognitively, as when one believes that a particular fellow citizen is unlikely to take advantage of one's vulnerability; or it can be registered emotionally, as when one feels confidence, or a lack of fear, during a moment of vulnerability before other citizens.

When an election rolls around, citizens will cast a doubting eye on prospective representatives, but they can vote—that is, they participate in public institutions—only if they trust that the effects of the votes of other citizens, combined with their own, will not produce their political oppression. When distrust of one's fellow citizens pervades democratic relations, it paralyzes democracy; it means that citizens no longer think it sensible, or feel secure enough, to place their fates in the hands of democratic strangers. Citizens' distrust not of government but of each other leads the way to democratic disintegration.

When theorists argue that democracies are based on consent, they mean that the entirety of a democracy's legitimate strength and stability derives from the allegiance of citizens. That allegiance endures only so long as citizens trust that their polity does generally further their interests; minorities must actually be able to trust the majorities on whose opinions democratic policies are based. When distrust among electoral minorities endures over time and congeals, such that citizens recognize themselves as constituting a disaffected group, only four outcomes are possible: (a) distrust of the electoral majority will be dissolved and converted into trust; (b) the group will leave the polity; (c) the group will rebel against the polity; or (d) the group will be retained by repressive acts of state force. (When distrust flows in the other direction, and the majority distrusts the minority, there is the possibility that the minority will be expelled or eradicated.) The first eventuality—the conversion of distrust into trust—alone suits democratic practice.

Distrust can be overcome only when citizens manage to find methods of generating mutual benefit despite differences of position, experience and perspective. The discovery of such methods is the central project of democracy. Majority rule is nonsensical as a principle of fairness unless it is conducted in ways that provide minorities with reasons to remain attached to the polity. The central feature of democratic politics is therefore not its broad definition of

citizenship or its ultimate dependence on majority rule, but rather its commitment to preserving the allegiance of all citizens, including electoral minorities, *despite* majority rule.

Would we join a club if we knew that all its policies would go against our own interests? No. Would we join if we knew that every vote would find us in the minority? We might, provided that we trusted that the majority decisions, despite our dissent, would still generally advance our own interests.

The central challenge for democracy is to develop methods for making majority decisions that, despite their partiality, also somehow incorporate the reasonable interests of those who have voted against those decisions, for otherwise minorities would have no reason to remain members of a democratic polity. Without such methods, popular government cannot become a stable form of political organization.

FOSSILIZED DISTRUST INDICATES FAILURE AT THIS KEY DEMOCRATIC task of holding majorities and minorities together. The Southern "civil wars" of the '50s and '60s were contained because rebellious citizens turned their allegiance to the national majority. Not all cases of fossilized division will erupt in civil war, but all will generate significant economic and psychological costs. People talk about "climates" of trust and distrust because high lev-

If we rely too heavily on police we will have acquired modes of citizenship appropriate to a police state.

els of distrust make life uncomfortable, even difficult, and require extra measures for basic survival, just as climates of excessive heat or cold do. Citizens who try to do business or conduct politics against a backdrop of distrust inevitably expend financial and psychic resources in maintaining protections against those in whom they have no faith. Worse still, in democracies that are marked by settled patterns of distrust, citizens develop modes of political behavior designed to maintain boundaries; such behaviors corrode democratic citizenship from within.

The recent presidential election results on a county-by-county basis were such that we can talk about red and blue counties—small geographic areas where a majority of the population voted the same way. Our habit, however, is to divide the nation into red and blue states. This formulation amplifies our sense of mutual difference and feeds distrust. More importantly—and this is a regular and inevitable side effect of distrust—it blinds us to who and what we really are.

None of this is to say that, given current levels of distrust, the end of the world is at hand. The United States is nowhere near an internal apocalypse. Rather, we are at a historical point where we have the time and the confidence of our successes to reorient our political practices in order to strengthen and prolong the democratic experiment. The framers of the U.S. Constitution devised institutions that went a long way toward avoiding the problem of radical distrust within a citizenry, but because the democratic project was so unprecedented, they were unable to identify those practices that might serve to actively dissolve distrust. That task has been reserved for us.

I do not argue for an institutional solution to distrust, but instead for new forms of citizenship that, when coupled with pre-existing liberal institutions, can encourage trust between citizens. To begin with, all citizens must see themselves as founders of the



stranger's gaze belong to those still in their political minority. Couldn't we devise an education that, rather than teaching citizens not to talk to strangers, instead teaches them how to interact with them self-confidently?

Most of us take positive pleasure from living among strangers. They are, more often than not, a source of wonder to us, and wonder is (as Aristotle put it) the beginning of philosophy. Strangers help feed the human desire to learn. Nonetheless, strangers also raise fears that are sometimes justified; security is and always will be a real political issue. How should we handle it?

These days our instinct is to vote for more police or secret police, yet experience suggests that strengthened penal regimes destroy trust where it already exists. Any city-dweller knows that streets are safer the more they

are occupied by ordinary folk, and in recent years urban planners, in order to encourage us out of our houses and back to interaction, have designed benches, fountains, lighting systems, maps and well-marked pathways, making spaces both inviting and easy to leave.

What is true of urban planners applies also to all democratic citizens. If we rely too heavily on police oversight to shape our public spaces, we fail at our jobs. We will have acquired modes of citizenship appropriate to a police state, and so will have undermined the very ideas of public space, and also of democracy. Like urban planners, citizens too have a panoply of instruments, other than policing, available for creating a public life worthy of a democracy. How can we now find modes for interacting with strangers that simultaneously enhance security and improve the quality of our interactions?

FIRST, SMALL STEPS CAN BE TAKEN TO HELP ACHIEVE A BASIC sense of physical safety. An urban planner builds exit routes into public space, so an ordinary citizen can move through her world with heightened attentiveness to which spaces are safe enough for talking to strangers. An urban planner tries to build watchful eyes into the background of urban space, so an ordinary citizen can develop greater sensitivity to who is where around him and to whether there are enough trustworthy eyes nearby to provide a safe opportunity for conversation with a stranger. One needs to display to strangers, as much as possible, that one is willing to give them the benefit of the doubt, and one must present oneself, too, as worthy of earning the benefit of their doubt. Democratic trust depends on public displays of an egalitarian, well-intentioned spirit.

Through interaction, even as strangers, citizens draw each other into networks of mutual responsibility. Engage a stranger in conversation as a political friend and, if one gets a like return, one has gained a pair of watchful eyes to increase the safety of the space one occupies. Engage a stranger in conversation across a racial, ethnic or class divide and one gets not only an extra pair of eyes but also an ability to see and understand parts of the world that are to oneself invisible.

The best way to begin winning this trust is to ignore the old warning, "Don't talk to strangers!" That is a lesson for four-year-olds. Eyes that drop to the ground when they bump up against a

Real knowledge of what's outside one's garden cures fear, but only by talking to strangers can we come by such knowledge. A direct approach to curing one's fear of strangers would be to try especially hard to engage in conversation with those strangers who come from worlds and places one fears.

I am no stranger to frightening personal attacks but have found ways of increasing my sense of security as I move about public spaces to such a degree that strangers are now for me a remarkable source of pleasure, and not fear. This personal self-confidence is one of the great rewards of claiming one's political majority by talking to strangers.

A POLITICAL SELF-CONFIDENCE IS THE OTHER GREAT reward of understanding that citizens have powers to affect their world that extend beyond their ability to dial 911. The cultivation of an ethos of political friendship depends on citizens' recognition of these powers, and their commitment to employ them, rather than police, to shape their environments.

As political candidates know, each interaction with a stranger plants the seeds of a transformation, and therefore each of us already has far more political power within our grasp than we realize. All democratic citizens, even nonvoters, are already more engaged in politics than they realize.

The bills of federal and state legislatures are not the only laws that structure life. A host of publicly binding decisions—some written, others customary—arise from public institutions like schools, churches, media outlets and businesses to set the terms of our cohabitation. Political representation occurs not merely when Congress-folk gather. I recently heard a flight attendant ask “those lucky people in first class” to put away their footrests. Anyone who offers citizens narratives of who they are, how their political world works, and what its structuring principles are acts as a representative, and such representation is carried out not only in schools, churches and businesses, but also in newspapers, movie theaters and even airplanes. Our participation in assorted institutions, like our choices about what to read and watch and how to speak about ourselves, shapes our political world. Insofar as a commitment to political friendship might change our institutional choices and our communal narratives, it would also transform our politics.

Whether any one citizen who makes political friendship an individual habit will noticeably affect our political world depends entirely on that citizen's ability to imagine ways of extending her impact beyond her particular interactions with other citizens. When a citizen wishes to cultivate this new form of citizenship throughout the polity she is obliged to confront institutions once again. Institutions are ossified versions of particular patterns of human interaction, and they inevitably extend the reach and force of the cultural norms around which they are shaped. A shift in how people interact will inevitably also transform their institutions, just as when the snail changes direction, its shell turns too.

BUT THE CULTIVATION OF NEW CULTURAL HABITS IS NOT the only way to reorient institutions. We can also reconfigure them through intentional policy. An institution constituted to amplify the effect of one set of norms in the world can be reconstituted so as to amplify another set of norms. A citizen who wishes to extend the reach of her own practice of political friendship will have to engage with the institutions in which she participates. Do they act like political friends? If not, what might bring them closer to that ideal? All citizens who desire to live in a democracy that has

slipped the shackles of domination and acquiescence must embody their idea of what a free people should be. This means pushing the institutions that one inhabits to embody this norm too, for they are extensions of our selves, as is the shell to the snail.

“Unless we continually explore the network of complex relationships which bind us together,” as Ralph Ellison put it, “we [will] continue being the victims of various inadequate conceptions of ourselves, both as individuals and as citizens of a nation of diverse people.” The adoption of the aspirations and techniques of political friendship by any of us, even individually, would have ramifying effects. And, happily, liberalism allows us to extend political friendship beyond local to national contexts. Wherever we move throughout our polity, we have opportunities to engage strangers in political friendship because strong institutional protections of rights free us to take risks on interactions that we could not otherwise afford.


The final test of whether we have managed to cultivate political friendship in our own communities is not how we treat the residents immediately around us, but whether a stranger to our neighborhood, any stranger also willing to act like a political friend, including strangers from beyond the nation's borders, could land there and flourish with us.

My utopia stands as a proposal to democratic citizens generally to develop their capacities for political imagination, particularly with reference to the strangers in their lives. The long-term ability of this democracy to convert distrust to trust is the reward. ■

DANIELLE ALLEN is dean of the Division of Humanities at the University of Chicago and author, most recently, of *Talking To Strangers* (University of Chicago Press, 2004), from which this essay was adapted.

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*The closing of the
Galesburg Maytag
plant has left more
manufacturing
workers pondering an
uncertain future.*

Maytag Moves to Mexico

By David Moberg

GALESBURG, ILLINOIS—MANY AMERICANS dream of getting rich. Aaron Kemp had more modest ambitions. “I wanted to work at a decent job and earn a decent wage, with decent benefits, so I can raise my kids, give them a decent education and maybe take them out to Pizza Hut on a Friday night. I don’t need a Mercedes, just a ho-hum existence, and now,” he says, with sadness and anger in his voice, “it seems hard to even do that.”

Eight years ago, Kemp began working at the factory of Maytag Corporation, the largest employer in Galesburg, a western Illinois town of 34,000 and the birthplace of poet Carl Sandburg. In September, Maytag finally closed the plant, after sending a large part of the work that 1,600 people had recently been performing to a new Maytag factory in Reynosa, Mexico; another large part to Daewoo, a Korean multinational subcontractor that is expected to build a plant in Mexico; and a few dozen jobs to a plant in Iowa. Now Kemp, a 31-year-old union safety and education official with a muscular build and a small goatee, has a temporary job as a counselor to laid-off workers at two-thirds his old pay.

The local Machinists union fought the shutdown, taking their case to the streets, to the press, to politicians and to Maytag shareholders, even winning national attention when Senator-elect Barack Obama mentioned their cause in his Democratic convention keynote speech. But the union could not stop the Maytag jobs from being added to the tally of 2.7 million manufacturing jobs lost since 2000. Those several million jobs were eliminated for many reasons—including declining demand, rising efficiency and increased imports—but a significant portion are the result of U.S.

multinational corporations, like Maytag, moving production out of the country.

Although the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics concluded that during the first three months of this year only 4,633 workers lost jobs because of investment shifts overseas, a study for the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission by Kate Bronfenbrenner of Cornell University and Stephanie Luce of the University of Massachusetts found that at least more than five times that number of jobs were lost in the same period. They also estimate that in 2004 more than 400,000 jobs will be shifted from the United States to other countries. That's nearly twice the rate in 2001, and it represents about one-fourth of all mass layoffs in 2004.

Despite the trend toward outsourcing white-collar jobs, Bronfenbrenner and Luce found that more than four-fifths of job shifts were still in manufacturing industries and more than one-third of the estimated 400,000 jobs shifted went to Mexico. But China is in second place, and rapidly rising in popularity. They also found that companies disproportionately target unionized jobs, which represent 39 percent of all jobs shifted out of the United States but only 8.2 percent of the private workforce. The Midwest has been hardest hit, most of all Illinois, which in the first three months of 2004 lost at least 7,555 jobs—almost all to Mexico.

Local losses cut deep

The loss of 1,600 jobs with the Maytag closing is hard on Galesburg, where 5 percent of the town's workforce lost jobs, as well as the small surrounding towns. But the ripple effects—from lost jobs at nearby suppliers (including a workshop for the disabled that employed 100 people working on Maytag subassemblies) to indirect effects of declining consumption and reduced tax revenues—will raise the total job loss in the region to roughly 4,166, according to a Western Illinois University study.

That's only a part of the region's woes. In January, the new Australian owners of Butler Manufacturing, which makes steel buildings, will close their Galesburg plant—dumping both 270 manufacturing employees and the only unionized Butler facility. In the past few years, other area factories have closed or greatly cut back on their workforce, including a rubber hose manufacturer, a ceramics manufacturer, and several small industrial parts and equipment makers.

Some, but not all, of these other job losses involve shifts out of the country. They become part of the national problem posed by the growing trade deficit that may approach a record \$600 billion this year. As more governments and financial market players have perceived this deficit—and the federal budget deficit—as unsustainable, the value of the dollar has fallen. The deficit increase partly reflects rising oil prices and a growing trade imbalance with China, whose currency, the yuan, is pegged to the dollar and, according to critics, undervalued. But the deficit is also a result of the shift in jobs manufacturing tradable goods.

A declining dollar should reduce this trade deficit. But changes in the American economy may blunt its effect. With the decline in its manufacturing base, the United States has fewer producers of tradable goods for export and relies more on imports for essential goods, even if their price in dollars rises sharply. The United States even runs deficits in agricultural commodities and advanced technology, while the small trade surplus in services has been shrinking. The surge in offshoring of white-collar work undercuts the traditional expectation that the United States would simply shift to theoretically higher skilled jobs as it lost manufacturing.

The attention focused on offshoring call-center or software jobs has reinforced the assumption, at least in elite political circles, that manufacturing is a lost cause, especially if the product can be made in China.

Maytag workers argue for quality, morality

But Maytag workers had a strategy for saving their jobs. David Bevard, the articulate and thoughtful local union president, wanted Maytag to continue to position itself as a high-quality, premium-priced,

Offshoring disproportionately targets unionized jobs, which represent 39 percent of all jobs shifted overseas but only 8.2 percent of the private workforce.

Made-in-America classic; he argued that the company was damaging itself by undermining workers at the Galesburg plant who wanted to maintain high standards of quality and by accepting “junk” from offshore suppliers. Union members also wanted their protests to make other employers think twice about shifting jobs overseas. And they saw themselves in a global battle for justice.

Workers losing their \$15 an hour jobs in Galesburg have a surprising empathy for the Mexican maquiladora workers who would be doing the same work for roughly one-sixth the wage. “The only people being done more a disservice than the people in Galesburg are the people who are going to have our jobs,” Kemp says, sitting around the union hall before the shutdown occurred. “They’re the only ones more exploited. It shouldn’t be American workers against Chinese or Mexican workers, but working people against greed.”

“We represent 1,600 in the Galesburg plant, but as a union representative, I feel I’m representing all workers everywhere and try to speak for all those workers,” union vice-president Doug Dennison says. “This is so much bigger than a union issue. It’s almost accepted what’s happening in Galesburg is OK, that it’s OK to do that.”

“It’s exploitation of the many for the benefit of the few,” says Kemp. “Sometimes there’s a fine line between what’s legal and what’s right.”

Continued on page 28



SARAH OATES

BY CURTIS WHITE

Ratio Nation

While rereading the poetry of William Blake recently, I realized very little had changed between the 18th century and today. Of course, the media would like us to believe that the zeitgeist spins madly, producing “eras” as if they were products being

readied for the next marketing season (which is exactly what they are). The media doesn’t want you clinging to any antique notion of “who we are” any more than the auto industry wants you to cling to your 1990 Civic. And so we have the Sixties, the Me Generation, Reagan’s Yuppies and Gen X. The Cold War, the War Against Terror, the Clash of Civilizations and Globalization. This approach to understanding national identity and history is as dizzying and malevolent as that possessed girl’s spinning head in *The Exorcist*.

What no one wants us to imagine is that the fundamentals of identity have not changed dramatically in 250 years. And it could be that even *that* estimate accelerates the matter. For William Butler Yeats, meaningful historical epochs last 2,000 years. We’ve only just

recently emerged from the second, “Christian,” era.

For poets like Blake and Yeats, history is a long, grinding affair. Change is almost imperceptible. Reading Blake revealed that however much the details have changed, the big picture is much as it was in 1783 when Blake published his first book of poetry. The three principal ideological elements in Blake’s time were the backward-looking forces of Christianity, the Enlightenment advocates of Reason and Experience, and the revolutionary practitioners of the Imagination: In short, Christians, rationalists and poets.

Without question, the dominant ideology since 1783 has been the rationalist. For Blake, the “manacles” of industrialization were “mind-forged” by what he called Ratio—the tendency to divide the world from the self,

the human from the natural, the inside from the outside and the outside itself into ever finer degrees of manipulable parts.

In spite of its domination, Ratio has always felt it necessary to continue its criticism of religion, or “superstition,” and obliged to defend itself from the criticisms of its post-Enlightenment sibling, the Imagination. Ratio’s debate with these two competing tendencies has been taken up in great detail and energy in two recent books, both of which share at least one virtue: They understand that our problems are essentially the problems that confronted William Blake.

Susan Jacoby’s *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* is a useful tonic for a moment in which religious fundamentalism seems to own all political leverage. Conservative politicians kowtow to the evangelists, and even the most liberal candidates

person was from the very first in conflict with the assumptions of evangelicals. Jacoby reminds us in revealing detail how this tension between the Enlightenment’s reverence for Reason and Protestantism’s confidence in revelation have played out in national controversies from the abolition movement to the teaching of evolution to women’s suffrage and the civil rights movement.

On the other hand, Nicols Fox’s *Against the Machine: The Hidden Luddite Tradition in Literature, Art, and Individual Lives* attacks the smug assumptions of Reason from the perspective of Blake’s Imagination. For Fox, too, the present conflicts over the role of reason, science, technology, and the mechanization of the human and natural worlds is an old story, one she tells with great energy and knowledge. For Fox, the digitalization of the world is only the latest version of the problem first confronted by the Luddites: the end of the world of human creativity and the beginning of the world as human machine.

Her survey of the opposition provided by the Luddites, Romantic poets like Blake and Percy Bysshe Shelley, early critics like Charles Dickens, Thomas Carlyle, and John Ruskin, and the utopian efforts of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement is fascinating and inspiring.

Useful though these two books are for reminding us how little the media’s chatter about change really gets to the enduring essentials, there is an interesting paradox in them. The books themselves—their form, their rhetoric, their approach to argument, their assumptions about what they can expect of their readers—are an acknowledgment of the continuing domination of Blake’s Ratio. As much as I admire Fox’s book, I wouldn’t call it a work of the imagination.

Fox articulates what’s wrong with utilitarianism: It separates “individuals not only from nature but from their own

natures—from the creative, imaginative, and spiritual aspects of human existence.” And yet my feeling is that Fox’s book, and certainly Jacoby’s, is finally utilitarian. They are books of popular history and social commentary written by professional journalists. The prose, the approach to structure and argument are very familiar, are industry standard, if you will. Fox admires Ruskin for writing books in which “Divisions between topics are artificial constructs; one thought naturally leads to another, and it may or may not be the topic he began with. The reader must follow and put aside impatience for the pleasure of digression.”

Well and good, but this is *not* a description of Fox’s book, though it’s no fault of her own. If she had written a rambling meditation full of quirky genius and digression, she would have been violating her own disciplinary training and she would probably never have found a publisher.

Innocent though Fox may be, I think this irony cuts deep. Her

thematic critique of Ratio is in a form that Ratio tolerates because it tends implicitly to confirm its own reign. Unfortunately, the Ruskins of the present are mostly unpublishable if not, as critics like to say, “unreadable.” For these critics, digression is “self-indulgent.” Works in Ruskin’s spirit fail the rationalist test of clarity, of perfect transparency. This test, let it be known, is finally only about ideology. History and criticism written by journalists in a journalistic mode is unwittingly utilitarian in that it, too, seeks “the greatest good for the greatest number.” In matters of art and intellect this is only a brush stroke away from “dumbing down.” (“There is no audience for this stuff!” say the nice people in marketing. The nice people in editorial then go slinking off full of contrition.) In such subtle yet fatal ways we lend comfort to those we call enemy. ■

CURTIS WHITE is a novelist and social critic. His most recent books are *The Middle Mind* and *America’s Magic Mountain*.

Against the Machine

By Nicols Fox
Island Press

\$16.00, 424 pages

Freethinkers

By Susan Jacoby
Metropolitan Books
\$27.50, 432 pages


must carefully nuance their positions so as not to appear insensitive to fundamentalism’s primary concerns with “values”: orthodox piety, school prayer, abortion and gay marriage.

Jacoby’s useful response to this slowly evolving national disgrace is to show that the present culture wars over value (our red state/blue state standoff) is not a recent development and is not merely the consequence of a cultural backlash over the aberrant ’60s. Our culture war is, rather, a disagreement, an *enmity*, that is fundamental to our national character. The deistic freethinking and respect for Reason typical of figures like Thomas Paine and Thomas Jef-

ART SPACE



IN MEMORIAL: Ed Paschke, preeminent painter among the Chicago Imagists, a group of artists that gained attention in 1966 as part of Don Baum’s *Hairy Who* exhibit at the Hyde Park Art Center, died November 25 at age 65. Paschke rose to world fame painting ordinary people in glorifying decorative detail, often in juxtaposition with unlikely objects or images. He painted in brilliant colors, and always with a clear eye for the humanity of his subjects. (Above: Indian, 1991)



Scott "Wino" Weinrich plays like he's been "drinking Clorox all night long."

NANCY PUYN

BY JAMES PARKER

Appeal to Unreason

Pity poor Tom DeLay. Not only must the House Majority Leader suffer the snipings of Democrats hot to find him guilty of "ethics violations," he has now become the target of a heavy metal hex.

"The Deprogramming Of Tom DeLay," an instrumental track on the album *Mother Teacher Destroyer* from Maryland-based trio the Hidden Hand, is a straightforward magical assault, half a ton of chthonic sludge aimed directly at DeLay's biblically buttressed psyche. Gongs, drones, pummeled drums and a huge riff from the guitar of Scott "Wino" Weinrich cast the spell.

Will it get the job done? Get behind the oily twinkle of the DeLay face, beneath that immobile hair? We may never know, but at a moment when a large portion of America appears to have voted not with its head or even with its wallet, but with some part of its reptilian brain, this dark wordless noise is more eloquent—as a protest music—than 100

"Blowin' in the Winds."

Mother Teacher Destroyer is not all noise. Guitarist/vocalist Bruce Falkinburg, along with drummer Dave Hennessy, play fluid, devastating hard rock, with a power trio's thick-toned groove. This year *Guitar World* magazine named Wino #64 in their list of the Top 100 Metal Guitarists—oddly, because it is impossible to imagine 63 better players than Wino. He's a miracle of a guitarist who takes the monolithic low-end sound of Black Sabbath's Tony Iommi and twists it into his own downward-flowering psychedelia. His tone is immediately recognizable, and unfakeable; Henry Rollins has likened it to "drinking Clorox all night long."

As a vocalist, too, he's a thriller, with an old-school

warlock's wail. Lyrically, *Mother Teacher Destroyer* ranges through the head-on Bush-bashing of "Travesty As Usual" ("Based on cold ideology/ Face of lies and hypocrisy") to a more encrypted, oracular attack ("Earthly winds divide, Goddess heralds near/ Early frost arrives, destiny is clear:").

The Hidden Hand seem, then, an anomaly: a thinking heavy metal band. Which is not to say that metalheads are necessarily unintelligent, but that metal itself is pre-intelligent, a rough religious beast, hooked up to the uncensored and irrational, the lower systems of consciousness; from metal we tend to expect brute energy and the smell of brimstone and little else. If, say, Slayer exhorted their listeners to read Edward O. Wilson's

The Future Of Life along with Greg Palast's *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*, as the Hidden Hand did in the liner notes to their 2002 album *Divine Propaganda*, we would be shocked. If Metallica's Lars Ulrich paused from bashing Napster to cogently denounce the Iraq war—as Wino has capably done—we would revise our opinion of the man.

And yet the Hidden Hand's critique of power, upon examination, leads straight back into the metal primordium. To begin with, they are adepts of conspiracy theory, obsessed with information, disinformation, propaganda and its country cousin, mind control. Also recommended in the liner notes to *Divine Propaganda* is *And The Truth Shall Set You Free* by David Icke, a former BBC sportscaster who notoriously robbed himself in turquoise and proclaimed himself the Son of God. Icke (who later changed his mind about being the Son of God) is a busy and productive conspiracy theorist, attributing most of the world's problems to a family of blood-drinking lizards who start wars, run all the banks and prevent us from opening the "vibrational prison door." George Bush is one, as was England's Queen Mother. (Icke has also been accused of anti-Semitism, a charge he meets by insisting that he is talking about lizards, not Jews.)

That the Hidden Hand should be using a rogue metaphysician like Icke as raw material is perfectly heavy metal, of a piece with their interest in alchemy, archetypes, mythology, the whole whirling stew of arcana that saturates their imagery and sound. This is not well-lit, secular music—but how else are you going to deprogram Tom DeLay? ■

JAMES PARKER lives in Boston and writes for *Arthur* magazine.

BY NEVE GORDON

Israel's Ideologues

"Are you a donor to Israeli universities?" the anonymous writer asks. If yes, you should "learn what is happening on Israeli campuses. Be informed about what is being done with your gifts and generosity."

These are the opening lines of a new Web site called Israel Academia Monitor (israel-academia-monitor.com), a pathetic attempt to copy Campus Watch, which was launched in 2002 to police and discipline American university professors who criticize U.S. Middle East policy and Israel's occupation. Campus Watch is closely connected to the academic journal *Middle East Quarterly* and to the Middle East Forum, a right-wing think tank whose members have access to the Bush administration. Numerous donors with deep pockets support this neocon apparatus.

The Israel Academia Monitor, which may also be an offshoot of the Middle East Forum, is both preposterous and dangerous. Its instigators would have failed introductory courses like Logic and Twentieth-Century History. The law of contradiction—i.e., that antithetical propositions P and not-P cannot be true simultaneously—ceases to exist in this cyberspace, thus allowing the site's creators to intimate that donors should boycott all Israeli universities that employ professors who criticize state policies—while at the same time denouncing Israeli professors who favor a boycott of Israeli institutions.

Moreover, the Monitor presents itself as a human rights group of sorts, which aims to bring to light abuses of academic freedom. Its nameless perpetrators consider themselves not only the defenders of free speech, but an anti-McCarthyist movement.

The McCarthyists they inveigh against are academic rogues, professors who are critical of Israel's rights-abusive policies yet at the same time inspired by a deep concern for Israel's population and the occupied Palestinians. Apparently, their offense against free speech is that they do not enable zealous nationalists to voice their views—an absurd allegation considering that for some years now the balance of power within Israel has been tilted toward the far right.

At first sight, only twisted logic augmented by historical ignorance could draw a parallel between relatively powerless academics and those well-orchestrated, government-sanctioned redbaiters of '50s America. However, this is a feint. In reality the Web



inquisitors at Israel Monitor are accusing Israeli professors of McCarthyism in order to deflect criticism from themselves, while at the same time they set about exploiting fear in a McCarthy-like manner.

The Web site dedicates a page to each major Israeli university, listing "extremist professors" who, in the words of the Monitor's anonymous press release, promote "insurrection and lawbreaking" as well as "seditious" behavior. These professors also collaborate with "anti-Semites and enemies of Israel" and support "lawlessness and terror." An innocent reader could be forgiven for thinking that Hamas terrorist

cells led by academics are currently operating within Israeli universities, preparing students for the Jihad.

Israel Academia Monitor might have been a tasteless joke if the times were not ripe for this kind of witch-hunt—if it were not symptomatic of a more general and ominous mood informed by a nationalistic and sectarian frenzy.

The site's authors encourage students and scholars to pass on information about suspect professors, promising to publish incriminating material. The goal, it seems, is to purge

Israeli universities of those who dare question the state—or, at least, silence them—and to influence hiring and tenure decisions.

This assault, however, is not only aimed at academic freedom but at democracy itself, for the danger confronting contemporary democracy is not some new wave of overt authoritarianism, as it was in the early and mid-twentieth century. It is not even terrorism. Rather, the danger comes from those

for whom the freedoms that accompany democracy represent a threat, an obstacle to their uninhibited pursuit of dominance and wealth.

Like its forerunner Campus Watch, Israel Academia Monitor is indicative of the much broader attempt to silence all those who confront the powers that be. ■

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Maytag Moves to Mexico

Continued from page 23

"Morality," Dennison adds. They clearly think that is missing, as well as their power to do much about their situation. While most workers blamed "corporate greed" for the plant closing, they also blamed the government for enabling or encouraging that greed. And among an otherwise strongly Democratic crowd, people remember that it was Bill Clinton who pushed through NAFTA. "People in both parties are allowing this to happen," Toby Lادنendorf laments on closing day. "Who's going to defend us?"

Concessions can't compete with bottom line

Over the decades, Galesburg workers had grown accustomed both to the security of the Maytag jobs and to intimations of insecurity, especially as the industry consolidated into a handful of domestic appliance makers. When Maytag bought the plant in 1986, workers were encouraged by its reputation for quality. But by 1992, as a precondition to making an investment of \$180 million, Maytag was demanding concessions from the union and public assistance to keep the plant open, including \$7.5 million in state grants and loans, a \$3 million city grant paid through increased sales taxes, and local tax abatements through 2004 worth about \$4 million. (After the closing, the state passed new legislation to make expected public benefits of such aid clear and to recover money if the goals are not met. And the Knox County state's attorney is trying to

recover excess tax abatements.)

The union tried to cooperate to increase productivity, says Bevard, but management was only interested in cutting jobs. Union business agent Mike Patrick suggested that management adopt the "high performance work organization" model that worked well at companies like Harley-Davidson, giving workers responsibility and authority to use their knowledge at work. "Maytag had no intention of giving employees any control," Patrick says. "They wanted to stay with the command and control model." Indeed, Maytag tried to tighten control further and force more concessions, provoking workers to the brink of a strike in 2002.

Then on October 12, 2002, Maytag announced that the plant would close beginning in 2003. Managers told the union that the plant was "not competitively viable."

Maytag was profitable, but revenue and profits have been stagnant or declining and the company's stock price has dropped. Big box retailers like Home Depot were taking a larger share of the market and demanding lower prices from manufacturers. Also, other refrigerator makers had begun producing in Mexico, and Maytag already had subassembly operations in Reynosa. About three hours of direct labor are needed to build the cheaper refrigerators, and with cheaper Mexican labor that can make a difference of \$50 on a \$350 refrigerator, not counting the savings accrued from lower social and environmental regulations. Maytag will save money eventually, but there was speculation in Galesburg that Maytag was simply following the crowd offshore or trying to please Wall Street to boost its stock price.

Galesburg struggles to retool

In October, the unemployment rate in Galesburg was 9.1 percent. Knox County is on the state's youth poverty warning list. Galesburg recovered from major workplace closings in the 1980s partly through expansion of factories like Maytag, as well as accepting a state prison that residents previously opposed.

Now, to survive, laid-off workers must retrain as welders, nurses, office managers and computer technicians. But even in these growing occupations, there are far more trainees than available local jobs. Many look to long commutes or relocations in order to find jobs, or they prepare to compete with their kids for \$7 to \$8 Wal-Mart jobs. Meanwhile, economic development officials try to attract investment but rarely mention manufacturing, except to convert the region's abundant corn and soybeans into marketable products. The town has a new logistics park, entrepreneurial centers, and business incubators, and there's some talk about Galesburg becoming an education laboratory, a tourist center or an "ag-urb" retirement center for upscale refugees from cities like Chicago, a three-and-a-half-hour drive away.

The town is playing up its historic—and rebounding—strength as a railroad center and its interstate highway connections in the search for warehouses and distribution facilities. Last summer a delegation went to China, looking for investors and Chinese companies seeking distribution centers for the kinds of goods once manufactured in towns like Galesburg. It was a sign, local citizens thought, of how globalized the town was becoming.

"Globalization is such a fraud," says Bevard. "It's just a rush to the bottom for cheap labor. Instead of reducing the United States to the Third World, we should be elevating the standards of those countries." Then, perhaps, the Aaron Kemps of this country could hope once again for a ho-hum but decent life for themselves and their kids. ■

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Mercury in Tuna

Continued from page 17

for two immutable reasons: They receive a comparatively bigger exposure (because of the placenta's concentrating powers), and their brain cells need to move and multiply.

No federal laws presently require existing power plants to control mercury emissions. In fall 2003, an EPA advisory committee considered regulations that would require cuts of 90 percent by 2008. But the Bush administration scrapped this approach and has suggested far more modest cuts that would allow six times more mercury to enter the environment than the original, more stringent plan. [Author's update: What continues to anger critics about the Bush plan is its departure from maximum achievable control technology (MACT) standards, to which the EPA had previously committed itself. If faithfully implemented, many argue, MACT standards would afford a 90 percent reduction in mercury emissions.]

At this writing, several states' attorneys general are expected to submit rebuttals to the Bush plan. [Author's update: These have been submitted.]

Whatever the outcome of this struggle, mercury in fish is not going away soon. Therefore, it is left to federal and state agencies to make recommendations about fish consumption during pregnancy. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) now advises pregnant mothers to eat no more than two six-ounce cans of light tuna a week (or no more than one can of albacore tuna). Swordfish, shark, tilefish and king mackerel are to be avoided completely. Altogether, says the FDA, a pregnant woman should limit her weekly fish consumption to 12 ounces. Shrimp, pollock, salmon, or catfish are low-mercury fish and are therefore good choices. [Author's update: For the FDA's current guidelines, see www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/admeHg3.html.]

Nevertheless, many public health experts argue that these new guidelines are still not sufficiently protective of fetal brain development. In February, leading health, consumer and environmental groups sent a letter to the FDA urging stricter restrictions on the fish consumption of pregnant women. One of the FDA's own committee members resigned in March 2004 in protest over the new guidelines which, he argues, are too lax. [Author's update: The July 2004 issue of *Consumer Reports* advises women to eat no more than three ounces of albacore tuna each week. This is half the FDA's recommended weekly limit.]

Meanwhile, because of rising mercury levels, sport-caught freshwater fish remain off limits to pregnant women in most states. These advisories are promulgated by state environmental agencies and are under almost continual revision. One continuously updated source for learning about these various guidelines is the Web site of the non-profit institute Mercury Policy Project: www.mercurypolicy.org.

* * *

My editor said she received no specific explanation as to what made the above article objectionable to Procter & Gamble. The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), on the other hand, did have some clues to offer. According to the director of the Environment and Health program at the NRDC, Dr. Linda Greer, Procter & Gamble has been active in opposing mercury regulations. For example, Greer said, when the state of Maine was creating legislation several years ago that would authorize its hospitals to collect information on mercury use, the company went straight to the governor's office to complain.

The NRDC is involved in the ongoing lawsuit that challenges the EPA's regulations for the chlor-alkali industry (see paragraph 4 above).

One product of that industry is caustic soda, which is used in the manufacture of soap and detergent as well as in the pulping of wood fibers for paper products. Procter & Gamble—whose other brands include Tide, Cheer, Ivory Soap, Puffs and Bounty—is a big consumer of caustic soda. Does the company purchase its caustic soda from any of the many mercury chlor-alkali plants here and around the world? Greer did not know. Chemical chains of custody are carefully guarded industry secrets.

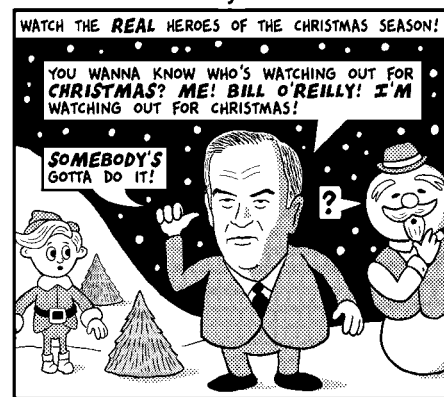
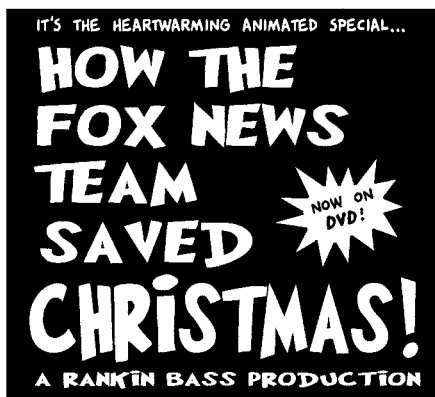
Certainly Pampers is a major advertiser in parenting and baby care magazines. Could the cuddly diaper ads in their pages have anything to do with the public's lack of knowledge about mercury-contaminated fish? Only Procter & Gamble knows for sure. ■

THE AUTHOR dedicates this essay to Mary Beth Doyle, MPH, who worked passionately to keep mercury and other pollutants out of the diets of women and children. Mary Beth died on November 13 in an automobile accident near her home in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

SANDRA STEINGRABER, PH.D. is on the faculty at Ithaca College. She is the author of several environmental books and, most recently, is a contributor to *What We Do Now*, a collection of essays by leading progressive thinkers in response to the 2004 election.

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



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Radio Insurgente

Continued from back page

"... transmitiendo desde algun lugar de las montañas del sureste Mexicano."/
"... transmitting from someplace in the southeastern Mexican mountains."

Stories circulate about the Zapatistas' masked leader, Subcomandante Marcos, sitting in a mud hut in the jungle writing communiqués on his newly upgraded Dell laptop. Indeed the Zapatistas have taken full advantage of new technologies.

Mexico's indigenous insurgents have kept close to the ground, expanding their FM community radio reach to between two and four radio stations and teaching radio skills to young women insurgents. Zapatista division of labor assigns men the technical roles and women the programming, on-air and reporting roles.

"Las reporteras de radio insurgente estuvieron en el lugar de los hechos. Así que podemos transmitirles un resumen de lo que grabaron ..."/ "Radio Insurgente reporters were on the spot and we bring you this summary of what we recorded ..."

Radio Insurgente reports breaking news from Zapatista and indigenous communities, blending political education with on-the-ground reporting. Take the April 10 incident this year in the community of Zinacantan, when community leaders went to see municipal authorities to demand access to potable water for their communities and were attacked en route by thugs from the Party of the Democratic Revolution. Reporters from Radio Insurgente were on the spot. They transmitted interviews with witnesses and those who were attacked about both the incident and their opinions about the revolutionary peasant leader Emiliano

Zapata, whose death 85 years ago was being commemorated in Zinacantan when the attack occurred. That program is now archived on the new Web site.

While providing information on the Zapatista struggle for autonomy and acting as a lifeline to the world, the Web site also serves as the legal arm of Radio Insurgente. It is archiving for posterity what has been broadcast to the inhabitants of the

programs like a special on Che Guevara. The Web site also archives speeches and communiqués by EZLN leaders, blending everything with Zapatista liberation songs and local music.

"Este programa va dirigido a todos los campesinos y tambien a los indigenas que luchan por una vida mejor."/ "This program is dedicated to all the farmers and indigenous people who are fighting for a better world."



GREG RUGGIERO

A Radio Insurgente reporter interviews children.

By adding to the thriving landscape of independent media in Mexico, Radio Insurgente is fulfilling a long-held dream of El Sup (Marcos), who once noted that "independent media tries to save history—today's history—tries to save it and tries to share it so it will not disappear." One wonders if Marcos had any idea back in 1997 when he issued this communiqué that a Zapatista-controlled, internationally accessible public audio archive of its people's history was only a few years away.

Chiapan jungles just in case the Mexican army shuts down the daily radio signal.

Mexican broadcast law, similar to Federal Communications Commission laws in the United States, requires that one have a license to send out a radio signal. Red tape and corporate control of the media make it next to impossible for anyone to succeed in getting a license. Yet, tiny low-power wattage stations exist all over Mexico—all subject to threats and harassment by the Mexican military.

In mid-September an indigenous station in the neighboring state of Oaxaca was violently raided by some 200 soldiers and police. Equipment was seized and destroyed, and 14 people were arrested.

Fear of reprisal, however, has not daunted the Zapatistas. Programming has blossomed. The new Web site makes hour-long news specials available for radio stations to download and play. It features public service announcements that educate the public about violence against women and advertise upcoming

"Ahora vamos a escuchar a Mercedes Sosa que nos canta Alcen la Bandera. ..."/ "Now let's listen to Mercedes Sosa singing 'Alcen la Bandera.' ..."

Some worry that the Mexican government may try to shut down the Web site and the radio stations. The insurgent women who are responsible for the bulk of the programming, whose voices grace the airwaves from 4 a.m. through the night, realize the signal could be squelched at any moment. But for now, with the eyes and ears of the world drinking in the MP3 sounds of Radio Insurgente, it seems like the Fox government may have missed its chance to silence the voiceless.

"Mucho animos para sus trabajos y que pasa una buena noche."/ "Keep up your spirits in your work and have a good night." ■

DEEPA FERNANDES is the host of the nationally syndicated Pacifica radio news show "Free Speech Radio News," www.fsrn.org.

Radio Insurgente

Giving Voice to the Voiceless

It's dark—the kind of profound darkness that a lack of electricity ensures in a mountainous jungle region. A dull pulse carries through the night of the southeastern Mexican state of Chiapas like an old woman's heartbeat. It's 4 a.m., and one can hear what has been a regular soundtrack at this hour for hundreds of years: a steady pounding as creased and callused brown hands massage dough for the day's tortillas.

And for the past year, Chiapas has greeted 4 a.m. with another soundtrack.

Fade in crackle, which quickly disappears, replaced by a clear and youthful female voice:



PRODUCCIONES RADIO INSURGENTE

"Muy Buenos Dias."/"A very good morning."

The voice is that of an insurgent fighter with the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), perhaps one of the world's quietest and most powerful rebel armies. The world knows them as the Zapatistas.

"Estás escuchando Radio Insurgente, la voz de los sin voz."/"You are listening to Radio Insurgente, the Voice of the Voiceless."

The voice is being relayed to nearby Zapatista autonomous communities from a makeshift and very clandestine radio studio. The Zapatistas have built egg carton-lined studios, erected transmitters and trained themselves to operate a radio station. Hundreds of years of media voicelessness ended in August 2003 with daily, 16-hour broadcasts.

"...voz oficial del Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional."/
"...official voice of the Zapatista National Liberation Army."

She is the official voice of the EZLN on the Zapatista radio network. The intimacy and immediacy of this uncensored mass communication is something that the indigenous rebel army has never before had.

"Son las cuatro de la madrugada."/"It's four in the morning."

Zapatista time. Daybreak. Fade in Zapatista national anthem.

The EZLN has said that access to and control of the media are vital for its community's survival. And while successive Mexican governments have surrounded Zapatista communities with armies and allowed soldiers and paramilitaries to unleash terror on indigenous peoples, the Zapatistas have worked quietly to build the capacity to speak directly to their people. So quietly in fact, that when the Zapatista broadcasts first hit the airwaves, playing popular music and reading *saludos* from listeners, even government loyalists unwittingly tuned in.

"Radio Insurgente is a radio station that is completely independent from the bad Mexican government," explains the network's Web site, radioinsurgente.org. This past November 17, the day the EZLN celebrated its 21st anniversary, the station launched an Internet audio version of the clandestine network. From recordings of local indigenous musicians and story-tellers to political speeches by EZLN leaders, the Internet audio archive serves as a history of Mexico's indigenous people.

Continued on page 31